

# wild

Australia's Wilderness Adventure Magazine

**Solo across the  
Simpson Desert**

**Rafting the  
Amazon River**

**Slow walking:  
a new way to go?**

**Call Your Bluff:  
a bruising experience  
in South-west Tasmania**

**Track notes:  
the Victoria Range  
and Northeast  
Tasmania's  
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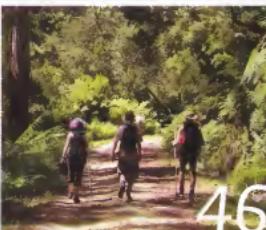


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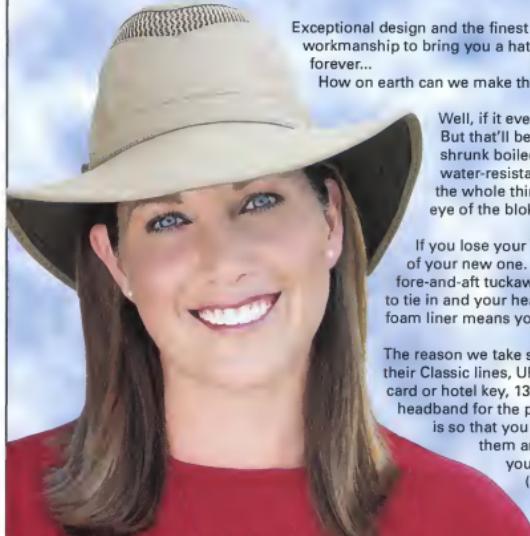
#### WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.

**Cover** Sharyn George high in the Deep Creek catchment of the Victoria Range, the Grampians. Michael Hampton



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# Wild

Australia's Wilderness Adventure Magazine

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# Tightening the belt for leaner times

A letter from the  
publisher

EVERY READER WILL BE AWARE THAT THE world has been experiencing widespread economic turmoil, resulting in subsequent social changes. This has impacted on many people and businesses including Wild Publications—or more directly, its advertisers. Most of these are small businesses, with a number of them having advertised with us throughout our three decades of publishing. Advertiser support is crucial to the economic viability of Wild Publications, but many of them have been forced to substantially reduce their advertising until economic conditions improve.

The good news is that Wild Publications is established on firm foundations, and throughout its long existence has weathered many storms. We have already taken steps to ride this one out, and are greatly encouraged by the fact that readership has not been affected. In fact, mail-order sales for the month of December 2008 exceeded those for the same period in 2007.

The top-down steps we have initiated for dealing with the harsh economic times include cutting staff and office accommodation costs. However, the measure that will impact on our faithful readers is the reduced thickness of the magazine. We have also been obliged to reduce the pay rate for articles and photos. (New rates are on our web site.) These steps are temporary, and will be returned to normal as conditions improve. In the current difficult circumstances, we have found this action necessary to protect the long-term viability of Wild Publications.

We have sought to spread the load while reducing costs, and believe that we have done this fairly. Proof of this is that our cover price has not increased since the introduction of GST more than eight years ago, while we have also held our advertising rates steady for more than four years. You, our valued subscribers, can help us by renewing your subscription online rather than using the reply paid envelope. Also, by renewing promptly, you save us sending out reminder notices.

We are confident that we can count on your continued understanding and support, and thank you for this in advance. In return, we pledge to continue to meet your highest expectations.

Stephen Hamilton  
Managing Director  
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# The Overland

## And other Tasmanian tracks

### THE MANAGEMENT OF TASMANIA'S OVERLAND

Track was awarded the inaugural Award for Excellence in Sustainable Tourism at the self-congratulatory Tasmanian Tourism Awards in late November 2008. Furthermore, management of the track has been presented in some mainland states as a model for the self-funding of conservation management. But the bigger picture is rather different. The public gloss for the Overland Track, and a recent funding commitment from Dick Smith to fund repairs to the Frenchmans Cap track (*Wild* no 10), shroud the effective abandonment of the remainder of Tasmania's walking track network (estimated at more than 3000 kilometres). During the 1990s, world-class track work and management initiatives were developed, but the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS) now seem unwilling or incapable of actually managing the escalating maintenance and environmental problems on many tracks. Perhaps the PWS hopes the self-promotion of a few token projects will deflect attention from far broader issues.

Even with respect to the Overland Track, while management changes since 2004—including a walker fee and booking system (see *Wild* no 94)—may have improved the situation, the claimed sustainability is difficult to justify. A recent PWS report on the environmental sustainability of the Overland Track noted that insufficient data was available to conclude whether there was any improvement in water quality, track or campsite condition as a result of the new management regime. Furthermore, while possible walker displacement to other areas was noted as a concern about the new system, data isn't available to consider this problem. Sustainability indicators also appear to be somewhat arbitrarily set and generally seek to retain present conditions rather than engender improvements.

The operation of the Overland Track is also claimed to be economically self-sustaining. But, if this is true, it has only been so for one season—hardly sufficient for claiming long-term sustainability—and does not include the recent construction of the grandiose and expensive new Windy Ridge Hut (rightly criticised by correspondents in *Wild* no 10 and 11).

Robert Campbell

Vice-President,

Tasmanian National Parks Association  
Brighton East, Victoria

I recently set out to do a return day walk from Cynthia Bay to Lake Petrarch on the Cuvier Valley Track, something I'd long wanted to do. I was disappointed to find that I couldn't go further than about 100 metres before the track was completely blocked by fallen trees and branches. I emailed PWS stating that every map showed the Cuvier as a walking track, not just a walking route, and so it should at least get basic maintenance. The reply told me what I



### "I hear you can spot some Wilderness from this part of the Hut Walk..."

already knew: that a sign at either end of the track pointed out that the Cuvier Valley Track was for experienced parties only. I acknowledged the email and made some further comments which may be of interest to readers of *Wild*:

"I've walked the Overland Track on a number of occasions. In addition, I've done at least half a dozen walks on the bottom section of the track at different times, as far up as Mt Ossa, Kia Ora, Du Cane Hut and Hartnett Falls. I'm under the impression that most people find the top end of the track more interesting...but I'm the opposite. Having said that, it must be agreed that the long walk from Windy Ridge to Cynthia Bay is pretty tame...And this is almost one-third of the total distance of the walk!

I'm very impressed by the amount of work that has been done on the Overland since my first visit in 1989. But more could be done to make the walk more scenic and enjoyable, particularly in this bottom section. Apart from cleaving to tradition, there is absolutely no reason why the track still has to follow the same route as it did in the 1930s. A couple of options 'outside the square' come to mind:

- Upgrade the Cuvier Valley Track and include tracks up Mt Byron and Olympus, and perhaps even a circuit including Mt Cuvier and Manfred. Maybe even close the boring lake-side track (but retain the ferry service...)
- Have a hut and a toilet at Lake Petrarch, creating a bottom-end equivalent of the Lake Rodway and Scott-Kilvert Hut circuit...

■ I've long thought that a track from Windy Ridge directly west to the Labyrinth would be great. I've no experience with off-track walking otherwise I'd...try it myself.

In an article titled 'Overlanding' in *Wild* no 90, Managing Editor Chris Baxter says:

"Walking in the southern half of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park—that is, south of Pelion Gap—is less interesting than that in the north. In particular, many walkers find the long walk round the shore of Lake St Clair not worth it. However, were the 'official' Overland Track re-routed through Pine Valley and then down the west side of Mount Olympus, it would avoid this section and in the process add intrinsically interesting walking, making the Overland Track a more consistently excellent walking experience."

I couldn't agree more! Be bold! Be brave! Throw away the blinkers!...Walkers in the future would certainly thank you for it!

John Quinlan  
Bendigo, Victoria

I feel I have to make a comment on the ongoing dialogue from Bob Thompson about the Overland Track and the visibility of huts (*Wild* no 10 and 11), initially 'correcting' a claim made by Eric Philips in his article on the Overland Track in *Wild* no 109. Eric Philips was correct first time round: you can see the new Pelion Hut from the Overland Track on Pine Forest Moor. In fact, its visibility was one criticism of the new hut when it was built a few years ago. And while I agree that Old Pelion is not visible, Kia Ora isn't very visible from the Mt Ossa turn-off either (although it may be from some distance up the mountainside track). So Eric was right (but apparently was convinced he was wrong), while Bob is wrong twice.

Grant Dixon  
South Hobart, Tasmania

Quite a few other readers have also assured us that new Pelion Hut is visible from Pine Forest Moor and other parts of the track, including one reader who has sent us a photo where the roof of the hut can be seen clearly from near Pelion Creek. Editor

### Cape Liptrap: no walk in the park

We also agree with Natalie Stowe (*Wild* no 10) regarding the track notes published for 'Wilsons Promontory's lesser-known neighbour' by Eli Greig in *Wild* no 103.

We have attempted to complete day two of this walk using these Track Notes on three separate occasions, twice from the east; eventually climbing to the clifftop and also being forced to traverse private property. The landholders were not very impressed. We showed one landholder our copy of *Wild* and he was of the opinion that the only route would be through private property. Another time we descended from the light-house to the beach and attempted to round the point but it was just too dangerous.

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We wonder if when Wild publishes under the heading 'Track Notes', some check of the details should be made? Labelling these particular track notes 'easier walking' was very misleading.

Julie and Graeme Kidd  
Tonimbuk, Victoria

We have had a number of letters expressing similar concerns about rating this as an 'easy' walk, with correspondents finding the walk both difficult and dangerous. All walkers who are planning to repeat this walk should bear this in mind. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to check the Track Notes we publish, relying on the experience of our contributors instead. However, the Cape Liptrap Track Notes were an exception, as they were walked by then editor Megan Halbeck, who found them accurate in both description and grade. Editor

### Camping at Lake Tali Karrng

Between Christmas and New Year my partner and I walked to Lake Tali Karrng for the first time. We had heard so much about this 'jewel in the crown' of the Alpine National Park, but had never had the chance to see it for ourselves. On reaching the lake...we were extremely disappointed to discover the condition of the campsite. There was a severe weed infestation, the ugly remains of large campfires, rubbish littering the site and, most worrying of all, unburied human faeces and toilet paper. The sort of walkers who are camping there on a regular basis (we met a number of them) clearly lack a 'minimal impact bushwalking ethic'. The track notes we downloaded from the Parks Victoria (PV) web site showed a toilet but we found only a sign saying that it had been removed because of contamination fears. Moreover, the sign said that PV would prefer walkers not to camp at the lake, but instead camp on the plateau above.

If we had had this information earlier, and known how degraded the campsite near the lake was, we would have happily camped higher up and visited the lake as a day walk without carrying our heavy packs down. Why then does PV continue to promote the campsite on their web site and publications when it is seriously degraded...and the sign at the lake asks people to camp elsewhere? I have since learnt that the lake is also a sacred site for the Gunnai/Kumai Traditional Owners who would prefer people didn't camp there. I wish I knew this before walking in.

The lake is a very special place to visit, but people camping there...is severely impacting on visitor enjoyment and appreciation of the site, as well as the very health and integrity of the lake. I feel that I (and other walkers like me) would overwhelmingly support the closure of the lakeside campsite...especially if an alternative, lower-impact campsite was established nearby.

A change in the management regime is needed, along with immediate action to prevent the permanent degradation of this remarkable site. It is time to show Lake Tali Karrng the respect it deserves.

Jess Abrahams  
Elwood, Victoria

Readers' letters are welcome [with sender's full name and address for verification]. A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

Photographer Simon Carter  
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# End of an era for the Murray Marathon



## The Red Cross moves on

Last year's Red Cross Murray Marathon was the 40th anniversary of this epic event, and also marked the end of a 40-year association between the race and the Red Cross. In 2009 the five-day race will begin a new association with the YMCA.

New Year's Eve 2008 was the final day of the biggest and last Red Cross Murray Marathon, with a record 1065 paddlers taking on the gruelling 404 kilometre course. The race was won by 57-year-old Albury paddler Tony Zerbst in a time of 25 hours, 51 minutes and 58 seconds. This was his 17th race, having first entered in the 1970s! Remarkably, the first three finishers were all over the age of 50. The first woman home was 22-year-old Bendigo woman Tegan Fraser, who finished 12th overall in a time of 27 hours, 22 minutes and 20 seconds.

The race was founded in 1968 by Mark Thorntwaite and a group of friends who raised \$250 for the Red Cross. In 2008 Thorntwaite again competed as part of a relay team, this time paddlers raised an amazing \$430 000.



The winner of the Red Cross Murray Marathon for 2008, Tony Zerbst, crossing the finishing line. Top, racing started at dawn every day. Luke Plumber



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# Mountain running wrap up

John Harding reports

Running events on peaks above 800 metres in Australia are usually put on hold over the winter months, with the onset of spring leading to a flurry of activity. Here's a round-up of results from some of the noteworthy events.

The Fitzroy Falls Fire Trail Marathon in New South Wales takes place in September, the 42 kilometre race offering some of the most stunning views in Australia. There were 97 participants in 2008, with winner Tim Cochran clocking 3 hours, 4 minutes, 22 seconds; the first woman home was Kate Hodson in 3 hours, 24 minutes, 51 seconds. In October the 20 kilometre Orrarat Valley Classic took place in Namadgi National Park in the Australian Capital Territory. Martin Dent, the City to Surf and Australian cross-country running champion, finished in 1 hour, 5 minutes, 15 seconds to slash more than eight minutes from the course record. Elizabeth Humphries was the fastest female in 1 hour, 39 minutes, 19 seconds. Trevor Jacobs and Kerrie Bremner broke records in the 32 kilometre run, clocking 2 hours, 24 minutes, 24 seconds, and 2 hours, 41 minutes, 50 seconds, respectively.

The Brindabella Classic, one of Australia's original ultra-distance runs, took place later in October, with the organisers preparing a 52 kilometre run and a 26 kilometre downhill race. David Hosking won the former in 3 hours, 59 minutes, 40 seconds; James Minto took out the downhill in 1 hour, 34 minutes, 27 seconds, with Humphries again the fastest female in 2 hours, 2 minutes, 5 seconds.

The Deep Space Mountain Marathon was held in Namadgi in November. The 44 kilometre course had an 1800 metre elevation gain and was blanketed with unseasonal snow. Cochran was first in 4 hours, 2 minutes, 22 seconds, only two minutes ahead of Vanessa Haverd.



James Minto, winner of the Brindabella Classic 26 kilometre downhill race, at the finish. John Harding

## Bright Alpine Four Peaks

Race organiser Reg Splatt reports on this race up Mystic Mountain, Mt Feathertop, Mt Hotham and Mt Buffalo over four days

For each of our 30 years we have grown, come bird flu, floods, fire and financial concerns. The 836 participants who climbed all the hills last year increased to 955 on the 2008 Melbourne Cup weekend. Whilst the sun shone brightly in Bright, hail, rain and wind on Hotham failed to spoil the spirit of drenched runners and walkers. King this year was Canberra speedster David Osmond, winning for the fourth time in 4 hours,

47 minutes, 46 seconds. Osmond wasn't unchallenged, beating local challenger Aaron Knight by only 18 seconds. Queen for the second time was Vanessa Haverd, finishing in 5 hours, 28 minutes, 37 seconds. Second was 2007's Queen Kathryn Ewels in 5 hours 44 minutes, 44 seconds. The women's and men's age division results were: 35-49: Maree Stephenson in 5 hours, 49 minutes, 35 seconds, and Aaron Knight; 50-64: Liz Short in 7 hours, 16 minutes, 24 seconds, and Trevor Jacobs in 5 hours, 26 minutes, 58 seconds; over 65: Helen Myall in 10 hours, 9 minutes, 30 seconds, and Max Bogenhuber in 6 hours, 45 minute, 52 seconds.

# Scroggin

## Mystery Creek Cave and other news

Stephen Bunton reports that Mystery Creek Cave was re-opened in November after floods in January 2005 significantly altered the cave (see Wild no 100). While the cave has been assessed as safe, there is still an inherent element of risk. It is still as dangerous as ever, with potential for rockfall and flooding, but signs at the cave entrance and at the start of the track outline these dangers. These signs encourage cavers to manage their own risk and are therefore an attempt to reduce the landowner's liability.

Mystery Creek Cave was the site of an unfortunate incident in 1990 when three people were drowned in a flash flood, although it already had a reputation as a 'killer'. Given this, re-opening the cave shows great courage on the part of the land managers and is a significant step forward. The dangers in exploring this cave are foreseeable but the National Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS) has sought to manage their risk by educating the public and allowing them to enter the cave at their own risk.

I sincerely hope that PWS liability is never tested in court but it would certainly be difficult to plead ignorance of the dangers. In the meantime, a significant cave is open once again.

However, during the closure, there has been considerable impact on two nearby caves. Reducing the impact on Loons and Bradley Chesterman caves has been a major incentive for the re-opening of the more robust Mystery Creek.

Elsewhere, UK cavers have discovered the world's longest underground shaft, the 1026 metre pitch in a cave near the Chinese village of Tiang Xing. It surpasses the Croatian drops of 603 metres in Vrtoglavica and 553 metres in Patkov Gust (see Wild no 65).

## Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack-sports events and instruction courses run by non-commercial organisations. Send items for publication to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181. Email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

### March

**Mountain Running Championships** **BR**  
22 March, ACT  
[www.coorunning.com.au](http://www.coorunning.com.au)

**3/6 hr R**  
22 March, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Oxfam Trailwalker Melbourne** **BM**  
27–29 March, Vic  
[www.oxfam.org.au/trailwalker/melbourne](http://www.oxfam.org.au/trailwalker/melbourne)

**Kathmandu Adventure** **M**  
28 March, Qld  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**The Great Volcanic Mountain Challenge** **M**  
29 March, NSW  
[www.coorunning.com.au](http://www.coorunning.com.au)

**Tri X Series** **M**  
29 March, Vic  
[www.coorunning.com.au](http://www.coorunning.com.au)

**Paddy Pallin 6 hr R**  
29 March, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### April

**12 hr R**  
4 April, WA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Alps to the Ocean** **M**  
8–13 April, Vic  
[www.rapidscent.com.au](http://www.rapidscent.com.au)

**Area 51 Series** **M**  
13 April, Qld  
[www.gar.com.au](http://www.gar.com.au)

**Paddy Pallin Adventure Race** **M**  
18 April, NSW  
[www.arcopart.com.au](http://www.arcopart.com.au)

**12 hr and Veterans' Championships** **6 hr R**  
18 April, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Bribie Island Multisport** **M**

26 April, Qld  
[www.gar.com.au](http://www.gar.com.au)

**3/6 hr R**

26 April Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### May

**WildEndurance** **BR**

2–4 May, NSW  
[www.coorunning.com.au](http://www.coorunning.com.au)

**3 hr R**

3 May, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**AUMC 12/24 hr R**

9–10 May, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**15/24 hr R**

9–10 May, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Redlynch Valley Estate** **M**

10 May, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Area 51 Series** **M**

11 May, Qld  
[www.gar.com.au](http://www.gar.com.au)

**6/12 hr R**

16 May, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**The North Face 100** **BR**

16–17 May, NSW  
[www.coorunning.com.au](http://www.coorunning.com.au)

**3 hr R**

30 May, NT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### June

**Mountain Designs Geocquest** **48 hr M**

5–8 June, NSW  
[www.gar.com.au](http://www.gar.com.au)

## Corrections and amplifications

There are a number of corrections for Wild no 11. In the article on Karjini National Park, it mentions the Department of Conservation & Land Management (CALM). This is now known as the Department of Environment & Conservation. All contact details in the 'fact file' should be the same, except that the email address is now invalid. The email address given for Peter Garrett on page 61 is now invalid; use the online form found at: <http://aph.gov.au/house/members/memfeedback.asp?i=HV4>. On page 70, in our down sleeping bag survey, it incorrectly states that 70 per cent of body heat can be lost through the head. From our brief online research, the correct range appears to be from seven to 55 per cent. Finally, in Equipment the price of the SPOT personal trackers should have been \$290 rather than \$2638.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

### SARA State Championships

**R**  
31 July–1 Aug, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### August

**8/24 hr State Championships and Intervarsity** **R**

1–2 August, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Snogaine** **R**

8 August, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**24 hr State and School Championships** **R**

8–9 August, WA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Lake Macquarie 6/12 hr R**

15 August, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Kangaroo Hoppet** **S**

29 August, Vic  
[www.hoppet.com.au](http://www.hoppet.com.au)

### September

**Night** **R**  
5 September, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8 hr R**

5 September, NT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**8/24 hr and Victorian Championships** **R**

5–6 September, Vic  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Quoll Adventure** **gaine R**

12–13 September, Qld  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Activities:** **B** bushwalking, **BR** bush running, **M** multisports, **R** rogaining, **S** skiing  
**Rogaining events** are organised by the State rogaining associations

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# Finding your way, off the path

Quentin Chester tracks down memories in a Flinders Ranges' gorge

You first must be on the path, before you can turn and walk into the wild.

Gary Snyder

**THE FIRST SHADINGS OF LIGHT IN THE GORGE;** I open my eyes to the grainy shapes of rocks and gum leaves scattered beside our sleeping spot. Rolling on to my right side, a river gum comes into focus, its limbs rising like ghostly columns of smoke. As my left shoulder hits the ground, I glance across our ravine. There's another dimly lit slope but poking up behind its crest is a rocky summit ablaze with ochre tints: shades of rusty brown, sienna and molten yellow. For decades these have been the pigments of my imagination. Though barely awake—my head still heavy on its makeshift pillow—the view skyward seems irresistible. The peak burns like a beacon fire, a signal across time and place.

I scrabble in my pack for maps. As it happens, the creek we're following is on the join between the two 1:50 000 sheets—too fiddly at this hour—so I pull out another wad of paper, the size of a business envelope. It's an old copy of *The Heysen Trail* no. 4, a

strip map covering the closing stages of South Australia's famed long-distance walking track. Unfurled, the map stretches to nearly a metre, and from its skein of contours I decide the incendiary summit is Mt Barloo: the seventh of the named peaks in the Heysen Range, a long saw-toothed ridge north of Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges.

The previous afternoon the six of us had ambled along a stretch of the Heysen Trail through groves of native pines in Aroona Valley. Being an old station track, we had the luxury of being able to walk two-abreast and gabble away while the ranges passed us by. The notion of continuing along this track was tempting, and doubtless we could have had a perfectly pleasant time strolling the valley, following in the footsteps of the thousands who have embraced the concept that is the Heysen Trail. But we had other ideas.

The southern end of the Heysen Range is a daunting massif of cliffs and steep ridges. However, further north ancient watercourses have carved through the range, cutting deep gorges into the tilted beds of quartzite. Bathtub Creek is the best known of these, and after filling our water bottles from the

hand pump at Pigeon Bore, we turned off the Heysen Trail and walked into the wild, towards the setting sun. In just a few minutes we left the pines and crossed the watershed along a euro pad, and followed it down into the creek.

I'd last walked the Bathtub back in the early 1980s, around the time the nearby stretch of the Heysen Trail was first opened. In those days, the occasional heavy-duty bushwalker could be heard muttering their disdain for the new track. It was regarded as an unnecessary incursion into the wilds, a construct that somehow diminished the experience of being bush and finding one's own way. For me, the real problem was that the track left out the good bits.

Lying in my sleeping bag, gawking at the sunrise on Mt Barloo, I tried to remember what—if anything—I had noticed about the peak the afternoon before. From the wooded folds of Aroona Valley it was not much more than a blip on the skyline and I had no memory of the mountain's towering presence. Indeed, most people sailing along the Heysen Trail north to Parachilna wouldn't have a clue what delights lie in store on the ridgetops or tucked in the creases among the ranges. I've always loved the Flinders for its secrets and labyrinthins. For me, a walk that doesn't allow time to loiter in a gorge feels like a kiss without a hug. But that's just my bias, and perhaps a ruse to avoid having to trek too far or fast.

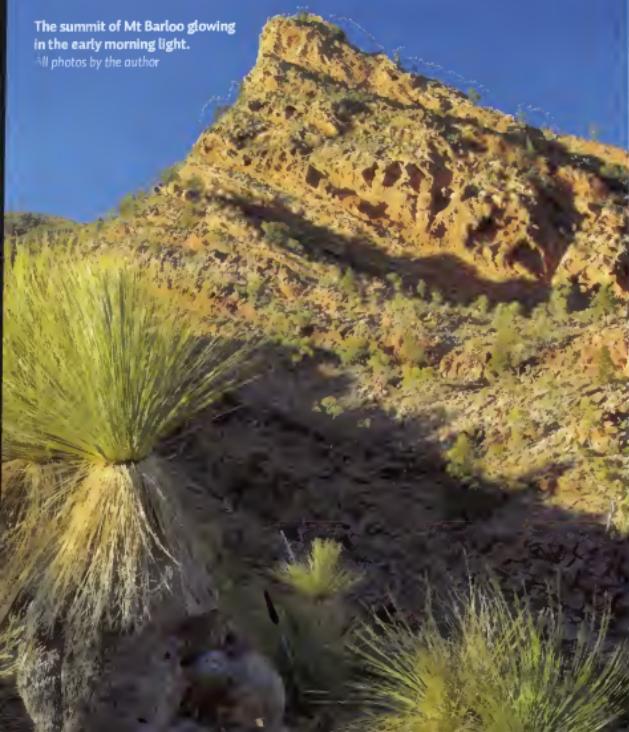
By contrast, linear routes like the Heysen Trail are geared towards covering ground and the art of travelling through the landscape. The terrain is the backdrop to a longer, larger journey. A generation on, and this journey no longer merely links places on a map; it also connects its followers to a pilgrimage, a store of experience shared and buoyed by stories—not to mention a love of country that can only be known step by step.

As it happens the northern end of the Heysen Trail is the beginning of a much older overland route, just one of many ancient pathways that cross the continent. For countless generations, the Aboriginal men from far western Queensland would trek nearly 1000 kilometres to trade ceremonial shields and other artefacts for ochre mined from deposits in the Heysen Range. Vibrant red and iridescent, the Bookartoo ochre was among the most treasured ceremonial currency throughout inland Australia.

After breakfast, we decide to head down Bathtub Creek and look for water. If successful, the plan is to return for our packs, then press on to the end of the gorge and camp, before heading south to recross the range and complete a circuit into Aroona Valley. For me, the Bathtub is a stage in my own loopy version of the Heysen Trail, a series of sites and sideways wanderings I have encountered in the ranges. Just quietly, I also hoped our plan could restore the memory of my previous visit, a mental file now badly fragmented by the lapse of time.

The summit of Mt Barloo glowing in the early morning light.

All photos by the author





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In many ways, the gorge doesn't disappoint. Just a few hundred metres from camp we find a shallow water-soak tucked against a rock slab spanning the creek. A short distance further on there is larger pool sitting in a basin of flood-scoured stone—and then another, even deeper, 'tub' to scramble around. Above us the walls of the gorge heave upwards with massive bands of strata banking at 45° into a dense, blue sky. Some bands glow a vivid brick-red, others are tinged in shades of umber, dusty white quartz and dark orange. We keep wandering the bends snaking downstream, and when our necks hurt from looking up, we collect striped pebbles from the shingle at our feet or rest and admire the bulbous river-gum roots anchored at the edge of the creek.

Yet for all this, nothing in the terrain really clicks with anything I recall from 20 years ago. Even as we break through the final gap in the gorge and sprawl in the shade for lunch, there isn't a specific memory of the place. All I seem to be left with is an image of an elevated campsite with a cliff behind and a sweeping view to the west. There's a vague intuition that the gully above our rest stop might somehow lead to that camp, but this hunch is unlikely to convince the others to follow me. By now the walk has put us all in relaxed mode. Sprinting back to camp to grab our gear and then resuming the circuit route is out of the question. In effect, we decide to step off the track as planned and simply wander back at leisure and enjoy the gorge phenomenon. Our destination is now, more or less, no destination.

Forty kilometres or so south of Bathtub Creek stands Moonarie Gap, on the south-eastern quarter of Wilpena Pound. For nearly a decade this was the most important station on my personal track north. The struggle of climbing on Moonarie's walls became part of a freewheeling life in which the rocks—and at some gut level, the burnished shades of ochre they reflect—signified the promise of escape. Climbing was a way to deviate from the other tracks of my life, albeit that it paradoxically demanded its own strict and sweaty code of striving.

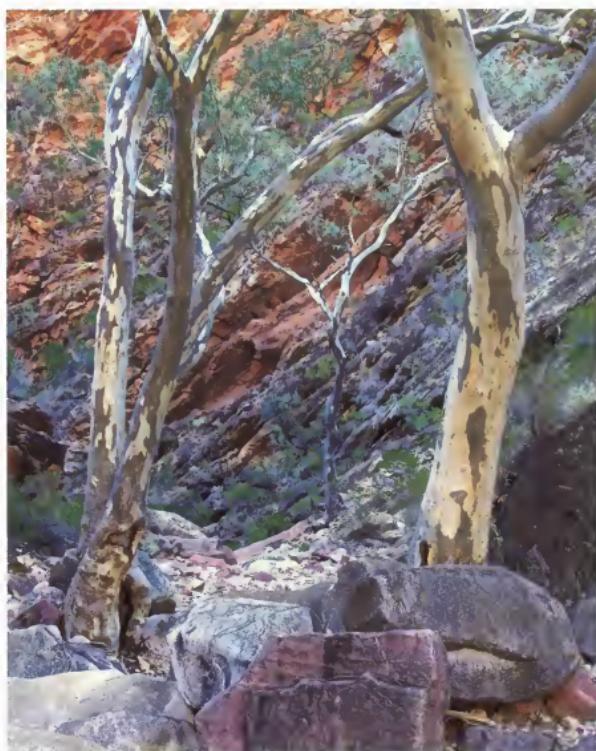
Perhaps it is the colours of the gorge's rock, but for some reason Moonarie is one of the many associations that comes to mind as we backtrack up Bathtub Creek. And given the climbers' practice of naming climbs to reflect their taste in books and music, my head churns with these names and associations. Among these is Desolation Angels, an old face-climb up one of Moonarie's red, sunbaked walls, a climb that got its tag from a lesser novel by the tortured trailblazer for America's Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac.

Alas, Jack burnt out young, but one of his inspirations, the poet Gary Snyder, lives on sage-like in the Sierra foothills. Among other things, Snyder's writing is shaped by his immersion in Buddhism and nature. His essays include thoughts about the practice of being on and off the track: 'There is the path that can be followed and there is a path that cannot—it is not a path, it is the wilderness. There is a "going" but no goer, no destination, only the whole field.' According to Snyder, following tracks is what people do in life and something we need to strive to do well. Yet at times it's important to step off these paths. And that means devel-

oping a gift for putting aside the self and letting the world in.

The very act of leaving town and going bush constitutes a handy step in that direction. Days camping out and walking are good moves too, especially if the experience is about something more than getting from A to B. Do it often enough and walking can become a skill as refined as any

grass tree to fill the foreground. I take some shots and then move the camera, trying to get a better angle, but it's not quite right. In the end I leave the camera gear behind and continue sidling up the spur. Crossing into a rocky amphitheatre, there's a fresh view north along the vast bulk of the Heysen Range to the hulking twin summits of Iralbo Peak. I scramble



River red gums hold their ground in the jumble of boulders and scree at the head of Bathtub Gorge.

other, a venture in which we forget taking deliberate steps and enter the field of memory and sensation. Stepping 'off the path' doesn't need to be some epic departure, but it does mean being open to seeing things from the inside out, things that take you by surprise. It might start with a gesture or an act of play or simply deciding to sleep in a gorge with nothing between you and the open sky.

On the second morning of our camp in Bathtub Creek I'm awake and dressed even before the sun hits the prow of Mt Barloo. With camera and tripod in hand, I tiptoe past the others and cross on to the slope leading to the mountain. The idea is to photograph the dawn light, to capture the moment forever. I zigzag up the scree, weaving among the spinifex clumps. A breeze swishes down the gorge, cooling me as I climb.

Atop the spur there's a broken slab of rock on which to perch the tripod and a well-placed

yet higher on to the next ridgeline and peer across to the ribs of rock at the end of the gorge. I imagine for a moment that I can glimpse, among the shadows, the perched terrace where we camped on our circuit two decades earlier. And then my eye is caught by the dip in the range and I follow the opening to the westward plains and the vastness of Lake Torrens. It feels like a long time before I turn and look over my left shoulder and suddenly realise that I've been out there, somewhere off the path, and that the sun has set fire to Mt Barloo once again. 

A Wild contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. His preferred habitats include isolated corners of the outback and northern Australia, offshore islands and obscure gorges in the Flinders Ranges. His latest book is *Tales from the Bush* and his web blog is at: <http://quentinchester.blogspot.com>

# Traversing Sturt's Hell



**Michael Giacometti  
walks east-west  
across the Simpson  
(Arunta) Desert**

Ascending one of the sand ridges I sow o  
numberless succession of these terrific objects  
rising above each other to the east and west.  
Northwards they ran before me for more than  
fifteen miles...The scene was awfully fearful,  
dear Charlotte. A kind of dread came over me  
as I gazed upon it. It looked like the entrance  
to Hell. Mr Browne stood horrified. 'Did mon',  
he exclaimed, 'ever see such a place?'

Captain Charles Sturt,  
Journal of the Central Australian  
Expedition 1844-45

**THE IDEA OF A SOLO AND UNSUPPORTED WALK** across the Simpson emerged as a masochistic present to myself for surviving two years in Tennant Creek; two years spent chasing swift, chicken-legged Indigenous men half my age around a football field, instead of bushwalking while my wife recovered from a back injury. I immersed myself in the accounts of earlier Simpson adventurers: Cecil Madigan, Warren Bonython, Charles McCubbin and Lucas Trihey. I wanted to traverse the width of the desert: walk through remote, unvisited areas, and avoid walking at Birdsville like so many others.

The seed of the idea germinated in an unexpected way after a conversation with adventurer Jon Muir in 2007. I was hoping to borrow one of his carts, but he advised me to make my own, and gave me instructions on how to build it.

'It's a big challenge, an unsupported walk in that desert', Muir said. We spoke of the wide valleys in the east, the spinifex-dominated west and the steep profile of the sand ridges, gradually rising from the west and falling steeply to the east. 'If it wasn't for that, the logical route would be east-west', Muir surmised. Logical? Maybe. Then why had no one attempted it?

It took little time for this new bud to emerge into a plan that was both ambitious and feas-

ible—at least on paper. I conceived a 24-day walk of about 500 kilometres from Bedourie to Mt Dare Hotel via Geosurveys Hill, a lone sandstone outcrop near the middle of the desert. I would attempt it solo, unsupported and avoid man-made tracks. This epic journey would take me up the steepest face of more than 1300 parallel sand ridges ranging from ten to 30 metres in height.

Trihey hauled a cart with all his provisions west-east across the desert in 2006. In a brief summary on his web site ([www.escalade.com.au](http://www.escalade.com.au)), he observed: 'there were many occasions when I thought...that the dunes wouldn't have to be much higher, or steeper...and I wouldn't make it across.' Upon hearing of my plans, he told me that he seriously doubted it was possible, although he wished me every success. The doubters had been proven wrong before. Bonython stated in *Walking the Simpson Desert*—an account of the first man-powered crossing with McCubbin—that others who were intimate with the Simpson 'thought that the chances of getting a man-pulled trolley through this terrain were minimal'.

On paper it seemed possible, but was it physically so? Were 24 days enough? I knew it was crazy, but I had to find out.



Self portrait of a desert explorer. The author at sunset on Day seven. Left, the author on Day 11, hauling his cart up a Howout valley in a large sand ridge of the central desert.

All photos by the author



### Day one—23 June 2008

In a way, I have been unconsciously training for this moment for 12 years, perhaps for my entire life. The 1000 kilometre drive across the Plenty Highway from Alice Springs avoided the northern expanse of Arunta, but several orange tongues of sand welcomed us into Bedourie. After a hectic final week of preparing and packing, it was a great relief to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon assembling the cart, evenly distributing the 80 kilogram load on the 25 kilogram cart, and having a last beer at the hotel.

I was anxious to get away this morning and start moving west. The send-off from the local mayor was anticlimactic. I hadn't prepared a speech, and didn't have any alms to allay the feelings of awe and potential disaster. If truth be told, I felt rather foolish, like a film actor thrust in-character into 'real life'. The mayor was just as unprepared, so I was soon hauling the cart down the main street. From the onlookers and well-wishers I sensed a feeling of morbid fascination, as if they not only expected me to fail, but my death was a foregone conclusion. I imagined the last fellas who pulled me up on the road to the pub, bragging to their mates: 'That mad bastard! The crows know where he is!'

As on any long venture, it was gratifying to get under way, to feel the hours and kilometres slip by. It makes the many months of planning and training worthwhile. Nestled in a grove of grevilleas some 20 kilometres from Bedourie, I began untying gear and setting up, establishing my new routine. During the daily 'vehicle' check I noticed long-spiked burrs poking from the tyres. I removed several large offenders before being distracted by the cooking fire. Later, just before turning in, I re-checked the cart. A flat tyre! My spirit deflated too: one day, one puncture. Would I be troubled with daily puncture repairs—or hourly even—like Bonython? If so, I might as well abort. I resolved not to remove any more burrs from the tyres and to allow the silicon sealant in the tubes to do its job.

### Day four—26 June

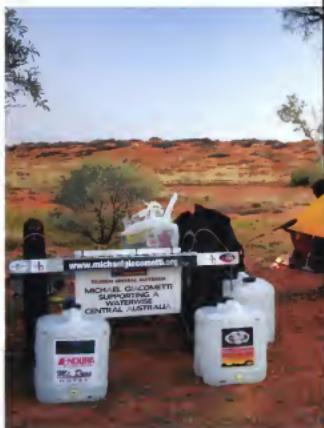
I thought that with a relatively light cart, the four days from Bedourie would be fairly comfortable, easing me into the hard work ahead, but they have been mentally and physically taxing. The wide, open claypans I expected between the sand ridges have often been thick with burr-riddled scrub on aerated grey clay, 'so full of holes and chasms' as Sturt so rightly noted, that they threaten to buckle or swallow the wheels. Crossing these minefields requires careful plotting, cornering and wheel placement. My progress is disturbingly slow.

The sand ridges have clearly defined ramps with cattle pads showing the route, but the pads are soft, stepped sand that require great effort to climb. Hauling the 100 kilogram load up them is just as hard as it was training with 135 kilograms on the soft sand of the dry Todd River, leaving me exhausted after an hour of non-stop progress. Several blisters are emerging on my toes and heels caused by digging my toes into the sand and applying increased force to move the rolling mass.

After the unexpected rain three weeks ago, Torqueline Waterhole—fed by Wilkaneer Bore—is full. Water brings life to the arid region, but the boundary between well-watered land and harsh aridity is sudden and stark.

Torqueline Waterhole, 50 kilometres west of Bedourie, is where the adventure really begins. I collect almost 100 litres of hot, slightly sulphurous water from the bore. I cannot rely on there being any more until the other side of the desert. The going has been taxing so far, but tomorrow I will be hauling double yesterday's weight.

I perform the readying tasks slowly, anxiously delaying the inevitable. Tomorrow the cart will be 35 kilograms heavier than I trained with. How will I move 170 kilograms? The bitter pill of worry lodges in my throat, disturbing my sleep.



### Day seven—29 June

I desperately hope that the cart breaks down so I can end this insanity respectably: camp for a few days by a Mulligan River waterhole, observe the dancing brolgas, eat until I'm fat, then walk out saying, 'I gave it my best, but...'.

Small rises, previously negotiated easily, are now desperate hauls. The euphoria of cresting a sand ridge is coupled with the heaving and sweating of peak performance. The lumpy valleys full of gidgee trees provide some relief, but they are soon followed by steep ramps. Viewed from a ridge crest, the desert appears like an ocean of frozen waves and I am heading out into these rolling breakers.

The intense effort is beginning to take a toll. Yesterday, sharp pain seared my left knee, forcing a halt. After investigation I determined that it wasn't a ligament or cartilage problem, but more likely calf tightness and referred pain due to taut muscles in my lower back and hamstrings. Good news, but the physical strain showing up so early is worrying.

Today's rest day, spent napping, reading and plotting the way, will make me stronger for the days ahead, but at what cost? I've come barely ten kilometres and 25 sand ridges from the Mulligan. I'm now one day behind schedule and worried that the break is premature. Sturt's questioning of himself in this region now applies to me. I also wonder, 'how far I should be justified in pushing forward under the almost certainty of inextricable embarrassment'.

**From left to right:** negotiating a barbed wire fence on Day two. Day seven was a rest day at a pleasant campsite among cumin-scented Georgiana gidgee. The view atop a central desert sand ridge, one of 70 ascended on Day 13.



## Day ten—2 July

A few days ago I prayed for the cart to collapse; now I hope it lasts. Although progress is imminently slow, the little steps are in the right direction. Several questions vex me daily. How far? How fast? Will it improve? Will that be enough?

It is very frustrating plotting what is barely progress on the map, but I am incapable of going any faster or further at present. Moving at less than two kilometres an hour, I've only progressed 25 kilometres in three days of hauling from sunrise to sunset. I'm now two days behind schedule, maybe a little more, and it seems unlikely that I'll make it to Mt Dare. Unless I cover significantly more ground during the next few days, I will be forced to aim for Old Andado Station, about 50 kilometres closer.

Every day I make minor adjustments to the cart: tightening and retying ropes and harness points, repacking objects for optimal balance. These chores add to the already busy evening routine that occupies me in the failing light of dusk.

I passed the last claypan with water two days ago. It has been an unexpected bonus to rehydrate dinner using the milky fluid from them. I originally planned a daily water allowance of four litres, before increasing this by half a litre a few weeks before departing. After arguing with myself at Torquinie Waterhole, I gave myself an extra cup; using the claypan water has allowed me to increase my daily limit to a full five litres. I strictly monitor my usage; a spillage or leaking water drum could mean disaster.

I never thought I would be able to haul the fully-loaded cart up the steepest side of the sand ridges, instead allowing for five to ten days of carrying two water drums up, before returning for the 130-kilogram cart. This method seems manageable—sometimes only just—but it is agonizingly slow and tiring. Fortunately, I have only had to reduce the cart's weight for half the sand ridges. I have the method down pat now, and can quickly determine whether to attempt a ridge with the full cart. However, the repeated stopping, untying, carrying, returning, hauling, recovering and retying have affected my pace dramatically. I have begun to think about rationing for an extra day.

## Day 14—6 July

'The attempt is so tenuously poised. It is as if I have climbed part way up a steep sand ridge but can't go all the way without stopping, briefly, to catch my breath and plot how I will tackle the next section. I am at the pause, lungs heaving, thighs burning, calves straining, toes dug into the sand to hold position, wondering whether I can haul the cart the rest of the way up, or if I need to unload some weight and do it in stages. I rock forward and back, forward and back again, then with an exhalation of air and solid push on my poles, I rock forward and step, push and step, maintaining the momentum for as long as I can, until I reach the crest and double over in a heaving, sweating mess, wiping the stinging salt accumulated on my hat and brow from my eyes. Slowly I gather my breath, check my compass bearing, then head down the spinifex-clad roller-coaster slope to the inter-dunal valley. Then do it all over again. And again. And again. At least fifty times a day.' Excerpt from Michael's essay, 'Tracking the Lonely Dingo' (included in a new Pilfotus Press anthology of Central Australian writing).

I am so knackered. I have been on a knife edge for so long that the cut is deepening, splitting me in two. The hot northerlies of the last few days have made walking agonising. The 'walking water', my two and a half litre walking ration, is not lasting as long as I'd planned, shade is virtually non-existent and the afternoon march is wearing me down. My mouth is dry and pasty after each break and the day ends

when the 'walking water' is sucked dry. Today it was after a solid five-hour push to lunch and an afternoon siesta. If it doesn't cool down then things could get desperate.

A few days ago I crossed Madigans Route—indicated by a few vehicle tracks—and the Queensland–Northern Territory border. In doing so, I moved abruptly from forested Georgina gidgee valleys to a sparse, almost treeless desert with meringue-like peaks of loose, wind-blown, orange-red sand. The first sight of this wasteland filled me with dread and awe. How was I going to cross it? This region seems to be the 'true' Simpson of steep rams and corniced tops; the ubiquitous cane grass, parrot pea, desert lavender and rattlepod grevillea all exist, as does the umbrella bush, noted by Sturt as 'a species we never found near water', but the soft spinifex dominates.

I no longer have to carry water drums, performing that task only once yesterday. What a relief! Consequently, my speed through the more open terrain has quickened to three kilometres an hour. I am now on track to get to Geosurveys Hill in four days. But will the cart and I hold out? Will the pace increase so that I can cover the additional five kilometres a day after the outcrop, or will I have to walk for an extra hour or two each day? If anything goes wrong in the next few days it will be difficult to walk the more than 100 kilometres south to the French Line and wait for assistance.

*I imagined the last fellas who pulled me up on the road to the pub, bragging to their mates: 'That mad bastard! The crows know where he is!'*

# Has it been done before? Other Arunta adventurers and their routes

**FOR MANY THOUSANDS OF YEARS, ARUNTA**—THE INDIGENOUS name for the Simpson Desert—has been the home of a number of Indigenous groups. They mainly lived near waterholes, soaks and wells, and ventured deep into the desert after good rains. To Western man, the Simpson Desert is a challenge: an area to be explored and crossed.

Exploration and adventure in Arunta has gone through four distinct phases: with horse or camel; by motor vehicle; on foot with support; and on foot without support.

Captain Charles Sturt was the first European to see the desert in 1845. Although several explorers ventured into the desert over subsequent decades, a non-Indigenous person did not cross it until Ted Colson's 1936 expedition on a camel. Three years later, Cecil Madigan (who named the desert 'Simpson' after his 1929 aerial photographic surveys proved it was one complete entity) led a scientific trip across the desert. During the 1960s, Reg Sprigg and family crossed the desert several times in a four-wheel-drive during the initial stages of oil exploration. Subsequently, several roads across the desert were developed, which are now very popular with four-wheel-drive enthusiasts.

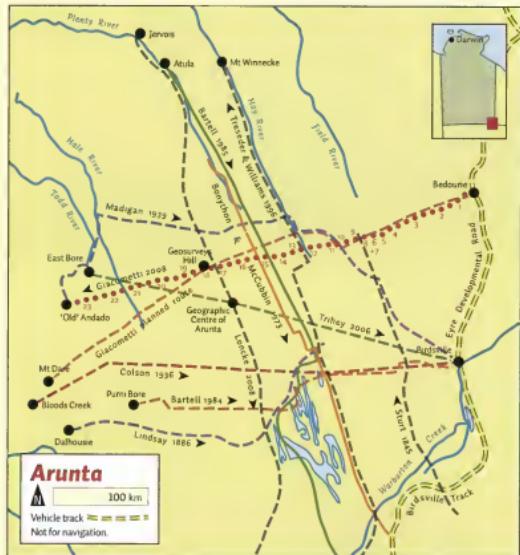
In 1970, surveyor John Gibson claimed to be the first person to have walked across the desert. As part of a survey of the NT border from the Finke River to Birdsville, he walked forwards and backwards between each surveyed mark.

In 1973, Warren Bothynth and Charles McCubbin proved that a human-powered traverse was possible. They towed a cart weighing up to 250 kilograms from the lower reaches of the Plenty River to Poepell Corner, then on the Ki Track to the Birdsville Track. Their 460 kilometre north-south journey took 32 days and required two resupplies by aeroplane.

In 1982, Hans Holstrup walked along the French Line from Alka Seltzer Bore to Birdsville (west-east) in 15 days, using a resupply. The following year Paul Sharp completed the same route. Denis Bartell completed two crossings: from Alka Seltzer Bore to Birdsville (west-east) in 1984, and from Atula Station to Cowarie Station (north-south) in 1985. On both crossings he used his knowledge of dispersed Aboriginal wells to procure water. The first walk was unsupported but followed many vehicle tracks, while the latter was supported after he abandoned his cart in the desert.

Peter Treseder and Keith Williams completed the first unsupported longitudinal traverse in 1996, walking from Cowarie Station to Mt Winnecke via Poepell Corner (south-north) in 21 days, walking almost entirely on vehicle tracks. Several others subsequently repeated existing routes with various levels of support.

Very recently the level of challenge has escalated to solo and unsupported walks away from vehicle tracks. Lucas Trihey completed the first such walk from East Bore to Birdsville (west-east) via the geographic centre of the desert in 2006. He towed a cart weighing up to 160 kilograms across 400 kilometres in 17 days. His crossing helped to inspire the most recent traverses of the desert, both in July 2008: Michael Giacometti crossed from Bedourie to Old Andado Station (east-west), covering 450 kilometres in 24 days, and Louis-Philippe Loncke took 35 days to walk the 650 kilometres from Jervois to the northern edge of Lake Eyre (north-south, see Info in *Wild no 11*) via the geographic centre towing a cart weighing up to 220 kilograms.





## Day 18—10 July

I feel a small measure of success having made it to Geosurveys Hill, the lone landmark in an unending sequence of sand ridges. There is water in a claypan to the west, the combination of water and stone (for tools) means this must have been an important site for the Indigenous people of the region. With only 140 kilometres to Old Andado, the homestead will be my destination even if the cart breaks down. It would be arduous, but if necessary I could carry everything I need. Only an ankle sprain (or worse) can stop me.

My relief and confidence are in contrast to most previous days. Even though I believed that the

crossing was possible, the punishing slog and rationed existence had me doubting. I have been hoping to succeed, but expecting not to.

Large clumps of spinifex cover the entire ground, leaving only the ridge crests and channels between clumps bare. I jolt back and forward, side to side, like a dodgem car that is constantly being bumped. With the reduced weight—now just more than my body weight—the cart is quite unstable. It flipped over the other day, with me attached, and I was lucky not to lose water. The same thing almost happened today when the cart bounced over a large hump, breaking a spoke.

Cold and gusty south-west winds have been blowing for the past four days, bringing near-freezing nights and cool mornings. Consequently, the 'walking water' has lasted for hours longer, allowing me to walk further. The daily consumption of dehydration and protein-carbohydrate drinks have greatly assisted me in getting this far. Despite the extreme workload, heat, sweating and limited fluid intake, I feel surprisingly well-hydrated.

The reduced cart weight allows me to tackle the sand ridges more directly. I crossed Bonython and McCubbin's route on Day 15, their equivalent Day 14. Significantly, I've covered almost twice as much distance as they did to get to that point.

Today I almost lost my GPS after forgetting to put a bag away after a break. I backtracked for 45 minutes and found it sitting on the right-wheel track. I navigate using a compass and counting sand ridges, accurately plotting my location, distance and speed with the GPS at night, so losing it wouldn't have been a disaster, but I would have needed to pay more attention to map reading during the day.

## Day 23—15 July

It is almost done—a new route and the first east–west crossing of Arunta. It is pleasing to look at the GPS waypoints and see only 18 kilometres remaining to Old Andado.

The first few days from Geosurveys Hill were very tough, I was physically and mentally exhausted. My body demanded extended rest, not just 'nanna naps' after lunch. What was left to prove? By getting to the outcrop, I'd shown that it was possible to cross the desert from east to west. But the remaining 140 kilometres still contained hundreds of low, steep, parallel sand ridges. Even pulling only my body weight, the going was not any easier. I still had to slog from sunrise to sunset to make it.

Only about five hours walking, so sand ridges and five litres of water remain. After being so down about my daily progress, I now feel buoyant. My feet will barely leave a trace.

And then what will remain? My cooking fires have been extinguished and covered, rubbish removed and my tracks in the soft crests will soon be erased by the southerly winds, leaving only a fiery orange-and-blue beanie that fell off the cart where I crossed Madigans Route, a blue pen about ten kilometres further west, a note in Geosurveys Hill's summit logbook and a line of linked points on a chart. ☺



**Top**, ramps up the sand ridges were the least difficult place to ascend, such as this one during training in the north-west Simpson Desert. **Left**, Day 24 finds the author looking happy as he walks into Old Andado Homestead.

Michel Giacometti is officially an Alice Springs local after seeing the Todd River flow for the third time. His post-desert wish was for water—fresh, flowing water. Within months, his tent was washed away during a torrential storm near Ormiston Gorge.

# From the Source **Paddling the**

**Mark Kalch**  
describes an  
epic adventure  
down the  
world's  
biggest river



**AS I SAT AND CRIED FOR THE SECOND TIME IN** a day, my mind was numb. I could not control the tears. I was wet, cold, tired and I was beaten. Nathe quietly asked if he could film me. I had to smile. Of course—we couldn't miss such good footage!

We were more than 50 days into Expedition Amazonas, a human-powered, source-to-sea expedition on the world's biggest and, arguably, longest river, the Amazon. This mighty river originates in the high Andes of Peru, slowly growing in size as it falls through deep canyons and meanders through rainforest on its journey to the Atlantic Ocean, some 6500 kilometres away. Our team of three consisted of fellow Australian Nathan Welch, a South African, Phil Swart, and myself. It had taken nearly two months to travel this far, battling fierce snow storms, altitude sickness, unrelenting climbs

and some of the most difficult white water on earth. We still had more than 6000 kilometres remaining. Would we make it?

We had just got back on the water after a five-day portage around an unrunnable section of river to find that the Rio Apurimac (as the Amazon is known close to its source) was now an altogether different beast—bigger, faster and a whole lot more dangerous.

More often than not, rapids were now practically impossible to scout and most definitely impossible to portage (portaging involves skirting around impossible rapids by land). We would run rapids, flip the heavy boat and swim. Emerging unharmed, we would get the boat right side up and push on.

One morning, having already notched up multiple flips, Nathe and I scouted the next rapid. Again, huge; again, impossible to portage—a must-make move to river left (river left or right is always looking downstream) and a narrow, steep chute. Unfortunately, most of the river was insisting we go middle right, into a deadly siphon that would eat boats and crews for breakfast! A siphon is a river feature that has a large opening but only a narrow exit. Once you enter one, you do not leave—ever.

# To the Sea: The Amazon



**Clockwise from bottom left,** the author showing the strain on a tough day on the Apurimac. Scott Martin. Nathan Welch passing down a duffel bag to the author on a portage on the Apurimac. Martin. The team on the Apurimac running class 5 and 6 rapids. Martin. A photo of the boat after it was converted for rowing; just inside Peru at the Colombia–Brazil–Peru border on New Year's Day 2008. Nathan Welch

*In an instant a big, white monster grabbed the heavy boat, flipping us as if we weighed nothing.*

This was too much for me. We had already flipped twice in a morning—and now this? I went down on one knee and cried. In that instant, I was beaten. If we did not make this move, that was it. I do not mean the expedition was over; I mean our lives were over. Nathe had to do something to pull me out of this depression. He assured me that we were in this together, that we would take each rapid as it came and we would look after each other. I composed myself and off we went. What choice did I have?

We ran it. The strongest and best back-paddle of our lives pulled us from the clutches of the siphon and neatly slotted us through the chute. We nailed it.

After a day of ferocious rafting, we made camp as the sun disappeared behind the mountain walls towering above us, the absolute beauty of our surroundings becoming clear once more. We scouted the rapid we were to face early next morning: massive, multidrop, multihole, with dire consequences when swimming—the usual.

I broke down again. How can I explain the feelings I had? We had flipped so many times, swum so many times, but still made it through unscathed. Was this skill? Awareness? Strength? Or was it luck? Chance?

If it was the latter, then with so many rapids yet to run, so much river yet to negotiate, that luck was sure to run out. I cried with all my heart. Not out of simple sadness, but from fear. Fear of not seeing my family and friends or living my life. Piotr Chmielinski, the first man to ever run the Amazon River from source to sea, had told us that ‘the river always wins’. Right there and then, the truth of this was more than evident. But there was an upside. We got some great footage of this big, bearded adventurer crying like a baby!

The next day started on a happy note. While Phil and I were still sleeping, Nathe slipped into the river fully clothed. When we awoke just after 6 am, he was dressed and ready, in wetsuit and all. We both thought how very keen he must be.

Our line was not perfect but it seemed okay. Not good enough. In an instant a big, white monster grabbed the heavy boat, flipping us as if we



weighed nothing. Suddenly, we were swimming at the top of a rapid with three massive holes. Plenty of down time was had by all. I was pulled to river left and swam to a semi-submerged rock. Nathe and Phil took the middle line (not by choice). They swam three big holes and a fourth, smaller one on river right. The boat was still surfing the rapid as the paddles passed by. Phil made it to the river's right bank and Nathe to the same bank, but a bit further downstream. Out popped the boat and, fortunately, wrapped itself around a rock downstream. As was becoming the usual drill, we righted the boat and set off again. We had lost three paddles and snapped a blade clean off the shaft of a spare. We were down to four paddles. Many kilometres

had won. There was no escape and there would be no survival if we passed through the gates of foaming mass ahead. My thoughts—and everyone's—were of our certain demise. It sucked us in. This rapid was class 6: unrunnable, impossible to scout, and there was no way out.

By some miracle we made the first drop. However, the entire river was then pushed to the right of this tiny gap and on to a rock wall. We, of course, went with it, high into the air, and in an instant the boat was over and into the final hole. Our down time broke all our previous records (not one of those records you really like to break). I recall kicking, trying to make the surface, but it was just not happening even though we were wearing the best high-flotation

ders. The boat ran a long rapid and disappeared around the corner to who knows where.

I was still river left on the bank and tried to find a way further downstream—I couldn't. I made the decision to swim across to the river's right bank. I had lost a shoe in the flip. Phil was still in the water and slowly making his way along the base of the cliffs on river right. By the



further on, by some miracle, we found two of the paddles waiting patiently for us in an eddy. What luck!

Soon, the river became much bigger and wider, the sides became less steep and the surroundings resembled a desert—more akin to the Grand Canyon than to Peru. The Río Pachachaca joined us from river left and we camped not far beyond a bridge, Puente Pasaje. We were relieved to have made it through another day.

The entry of the Río Pampas from the left signalled our arrival in so-called 'Sendero country', the region where the notorious Sendero Luminoso or Shining Path guerrillas had once been active. Now we had to worry not only about the river, but also about men with guns. Excellent.

Approaching midday after another week on the river, we came to yet another very long wave train. We scouted from the top, then on we went. It quickly became clear that something was wrong. The long class 3 (class 6 rapids are the most difficult/dangerous, with some of them considered to be unrunnable) rapid quickly dropped and what appeared in front of us was almost beyond belief. The river, which not too metres upstream had been large-volume but wide, was being channelled through a chute not more than two boat widths across! It just didn't seem possible. We were running an easy middle line of the wave train and had to do something. We managed to get to river right, but the current was too strong. We were now only 30 or so metres above this monster. We tried to reverse ferry to river left with even less success. This was it. The river had us. The river

PFDs available on the planet. The water grabbed us and took us deep. All the struggling and fighting had no effect. Phil recalls how he eventually became strangely calm. He had done all he could and to no avail. It really seemed to all of us that the game was up. All over.

Then we surfaced. The hole released us. Nathe and me to river left and Phil to river right. The boat popped out behind. I made it into an eddy. Nathe was behind, and the boat followed him. The water was pushing with great force against the sheer cliffs on either side. He made it up on to the boat, but the boat re-entered the main current and began to head around the next corner into the unknown, with Nathe on top.

We knew from previous experience that the boat was too heavy for one of us to flip on his own. Nathe made a quick decision to attach his throw bag to the boat and swim to the river's edge. However, the banks were almost sheer cliffs. He held on by his fingertips. He was slipping. Above him appeared a group of fishermen. They wanted Nathe to grab their rope. He wanted them to grab the throw bag attached to the boat. They couldn't understand. They wanted to rescue the man, not the boat, which was now at the full length of the rope and teetering on an eddy line. A couple more metres of rope and it would have swung into a large eddy, but it was not to be. The boat slipped from Nathe's grasp and took off down the river. The rapids that followed were long, class 4. There was no way the boat could be stopped. Nathe tried to give chase but it was an impossible task. The sides went from sheer cliffs to a myriad of boul-



From the left to right, the author holding a safety line attached to Welch as he attempts to set up a pulley to pull the boat off a wrap; the boat took a day to free. Martin Welch and the author sitting on 'Skop Gat', their raft, all a little the worse for wear at the end of the expedition. Vera Cordosa. A donkey used to portage the Acobamba Abyss, an almost unrunnable section of the upper river. Philip Swart. The author's hands after four months of paddling. Welch. Cachora, Peru, where the team got back on the Apurímac after portaging the Acobamba Abyss. Mark Katch

time I crossed, Nathe and Phil were on the corner where the boat had disappeared. We were all shaken but uninjured.

We couldn't rest. We needed to get around that corner. The only track went inland and then high above the river. By now I had discarded my remaining shoes and was barefoot among the broken branches, cactus and sharp thorns that littered the ground. It took almost an hour to reach a point above the river from where we might see the boat. We were exhausted, but we spotted it. From our vantage point it looked as though it was stuck on a small rock shelf on river right about three kilometres downstream. We were all very emotional and hugged among some tears. Everything might just be okay.

The area we were in was extremely isolated. Problems here meant big problems—there were no phones and almost no people. Back down at the river, we searched for the boat. We needed to get to the other side to get a clear view. Crossing the river and drawing level with the boat, my heart sank. Our view from above had failed to reveal the full scenario. The boat, sure enough, was stuck on a small rock shelf, but what now became clear was its position in the river. Running fast and wide on river left was a long class 4 or class 5 rapid. Then came the long rock shelf, with the boat upside down about two-thirds of the way along its length. What was not possible to see from the cliffs above was the still faster running class 4 rapid separating the rock shelf from the river's edge on the right. We could not reach the boat or retrieve it. I couldn't believe it. I stared for a

long time. It was hard to see how we could get close to the boat in reasonable safety to attempt to free it. Heading back upstream to tell the boys, my lungs heaved and my mind spun.

Phil and Nathe joined me and we spent our time in the day's fading light staring at the boat. We were tired and devastated, but also happy to be alive—and what's more, uninjured. The

Our new friends, however, were adamant that they could reach the boat, even though they had yet to see exactly where the boat lay. After much discussion, we agreed to stay one more night and attempt a retrieval with the help of the fishermen.

Morning arrived, and with the locals' help we were able to get much closer to the boat. No matter—the story was much the same. Massive,

down the rock shelf and straight back on to the eddy line—and almost back into the fast water. With another Herculean effort he hauled himself back up. He was hurt and crawled once more on to the boat. So it continued, shoving, pulling, lifting—Nathe was exhausted. But little by little the boat was moving. Could we allow ourselves the thought that maybe it could be freed? Next



rapid we had flipped on a few kilometres upstream was not one from which three people emerge unscathed. How we did so, we will never know.

We decided to take turns watching the raft. If it freed itself, it was possible we might reach it quickly enough in some slow water below the rapid. However, it soon became clear that this was not going to happen. It was a pitch black night with thunder and lightning rolling in. It began to rain. We had no shelter. Phil was caught in the open and I wedged my upper body under a boulder in a vain attempt to keep at least a part of me dry.

Nathe tried to watch the boat, but this was only possible when lightning flashed. As the lightning became less and less frequent, there was no point in watching. He found a small cave, high up the bank, where we spent the night. We were unable to sleep, but at least we were dry.

Early in the morning we again found ourselves staring at the boat. A retrieval attempt in such an isolated area was just too dangerous. The previous day by some miracle we had escaped with our lives. There was little point in now throwing them away just as quickly. As we walked upstream away from the boat, we kept staring back. This was it. The boat and everything on it was our life. We had the clothes we were wearing and nothing else. No money, no passports, no satellite phone, no cameras... We were in a bad place.

After swimming back across the river, we met two fishermen. They saw our state and took us with them to eat. They fed us massive amounts of fish and yuca along with sweet tea. They may just have saved our lives. They offered to trek with us to the closest village with a telephone—a day's walk away, all uphill. From there it would be an eight-hour drive to Cusco. Our thoughts and emotions were a mess—the thought of starting again with nothing was devastating. I made up my mind to get to Cusco, book a flight to Lima, then a flight home from there. It was just too much. Phil felt the same. Nathe was more guarded with his thoughts, but just as devastated.

fast water separated us from the boat on both sides. The initial look on the fishermen's faces said it all. But quickly they seemed to become convinced they could get their balsa rafts into position above the boat and get to the rock shelf. It was just too risky to let these guys attempt it, without helmets and without PFDs. Regardless, we were right there and Nathe was damned if we were leaving without giving it a shot.

We would approach the attempt with safety foremost in mind and abandon the boat if need be. I swam hard across the river to set up the only safety we would have below the rapid. Our rescue equipment consisted of two throw bags, a large assortment of prusik cord and eight or ten karabiners. It would have to do.

Nathe walked upstream and entered the river. Phil shouted instructions so he would hit the rock shelf and not be pulled into the mad water on each side. After some hairy moments he made it. Sometimes swimming and sometimes jumping from rock to rock, Nathe edged his way down to the boat. Between him and the boat lay two wide, fast-flowing channels. The first he traversed by inching his way across, finding handholds and footholds as best he could. The second was wider and much too fast to do the same. The only way possible was to jump into a small, messy eddy that had formed close by. Off he went. He swam with all his might. He was close to the rock shelf, then it became too much, he was being pulled out of the eddy and straight into the fast water. It looked all over. Then a mighty final burst got him back into the eddy and he flung his hands out to grab the rocks. He made it across the channel and a bit closer to the boat. Not there yet though. Negotiating some widely spaced boulders, Nathe climbed on to the boat's upturned hull and collapsed. He had made it.

We could see Nathe test the extent of the wrap. The boat had some movement. A push here and a pull there managed to shift the angle of the boat somewhat, but it still held fast. Nathe retrieved a throw bag from the boat and used it to pull at the boat. As he did so, he slipped backwards off a rock and took a massive tumble

thing, it was! The boat was pulled down the rock shelf as Nathe threw himself on to it. We were not out of this yet. He had to ride this upside-down boat through the rest of the rapids. I readied my throw bag, but it was clear he would come out far over to river right, out of reach. I grabbed the paddle and dived into the remnants of the rapids to swim to the boat. Fortunately, there was a long stretch of flat water below. I joined Nathe on the boat and with the help of one of the young locals we got it into an eddy. We had our boat, we had our home and we had our lives.

Next we needed to know what was left of our gear. Was there anything to salvage? Was all the electronic gear ruined? We flipped the raft: gear bags, duffels, medical kits, safety bag, Storm Cases—it was all there! Nathe broke down and we hugged each other (in a manly fashion, of course). This was too much. We had gone from losing everything—from the expedition being all but over—to having our boat, our gear, the lot. We quickly checked the Storm Cases. High-definition camera? Not a drop of water. Secondary video camera and still camera? The same. Satellite phone? Ditto. Laptop? Sweet! We were stoked. The show would go on!

And go on it did. The white water subsided, the flat water began—thousands upon thousands of kilometres to row. Phil became ill and left the expedition. Nathe and I pushed on together for the remaining 4500 kilometres, rowing 24 hours a day, nonstop, on a river that at times was 30 kilometres across. At midnight on 2 February 2008, on the coast of Brazil, we reached the lighthouse at Ponte Taipu, our final destination. In doing so we became just the fourth team in history (and the seventh and eighth persons) to successfully navigate the entire length of the Amazon River by human power alone. 

To find out more you can visit [www.expeditionamazonas.com](http://expeditionamazonas.com)

Mork Kolch has travelled under various guises to over 40 countries, mostly in developing regions, to live, climb, trek, kayak and raft. This year, he will walk, solo, the entire length of Iran.

# Take the **Slow**



# Road

Hugh de Kretser takes the time to enjoy walking at a more relaxed pace



I HAVE TO CONFESS, I THINK I'M GETTING LAZY. OKAY, MAYBE NOT SO much lazy, as wising up to a new way of doing things. A new way of walking. A slower way of walking.

We've all heard the lifestyle gurus carrying on about longer working hours and how we are all becoming time poor. Well, the foodies answered with the 'slow food' movement—their response to the fast food generation. So why not jump on the bandwagon and start a 'slow walk' movement?

These thoughts were first sparked about six years back, on a section of the Wilderness Coast walk in South-eastern Victoria and New South Wales, from Mallacoota to Merrica River. I've always loved this area and was looking forward to discovering a new part. The walk didn't disappoint. Four days of wild beaches, beautiful freshwater lakes, massive dune systems, rugged estuaries, heaths and coastal forest.

The only problem was, there wasn't enough time. It wasn't a particularly tough walk, but it wasn't easy, either. We had a reasonably large group, which slowed things down, and the end result was that we visited some stunningly beautiful places but had only a few hours to enjoy them. Overall, the walk left me with a thirst to spend more time there.

So, the next year, I went back. This time, however, I did things differently. Again I set aside four days, but this time I only did half the walk.

With twice as much time, or half the distance, there were many more opportunities to experience the area. This time, we properly explored the massive sea caves at the far end of Newtons Beach, working out a way to climb down the cliffs on to the sand and into the darkness of the caves. We had time to catch a swag of salmon while the sun poked out of the stormy sky and lit up Green Cape Lighthouse on the horizon. We had time to stalk an old wombat at the beautiful grassy campsite at Newtons and time for watching the pelicans at Merrica River.

Of course, we only saw half the area compared with the previous year, but overall it was an experience that left me wanting more.

Without intending to, I had stumbled upon rule number one of my 'slow walk' manifesto—take the recommended walking time and double it. Or go roughly half as far in the same time.

At the outset, let me confess that I'd like to come up with a better name than 'slow walking'. The legendary American naturalist John Muir said that 'people ought to saunter in the mountains, not walk'. He was, apparently, not so much talking about a relaxed pace of bushwalking as advocating for a deeper appreciation of nature. The word 'saunter', you see, comes from the French *saunte et terre*, meaning holy land. I guess slow walking is a deeper form of nature worship. And my thesaurus throws up 'saunter' as an antonym to 'go fast' and 'race'. So sauntering might be a better way of describing what I'm getting at.

I should clarify here. Slow walking isn't about walking slowly. Walking faster gives you more time without a pack on to enjoy the places you're tramping around—you can still take a 'slow walk' fast, if you get my drift.

In fact, I like to think that I still walk pretty much as fast as when I first started overnight bushwalking as an 18-year-old. Back then, it was truly about walking fast, beating the estimated times and getting to the campsite first.

Now, 16 years on, the competitor in me still likes to beat the walking times, but I have changed in other ways. I now like to know the names of the birds I see in the bush. I actually enjoy test cricket. And on overnight walks, I like camping two nights in the one place.

But slow walking is not just about camping multiple nights in the one spot; it is also about limiting the number of hours of walking you do each day.

You see, I hate getting up early. Even if I go to bed just after dark, I'm still not too keen to see the early morning sun. This means that by the time I've eaten and packed, there are less walking hours left in the day. Often, this is a good thing. I love walking, but I don't particularly love

**Left**, swimming at Zoe Falls on Hinchinbrook Island, one of the author's recommended slow walking destinations. *Juliet Morris*

spending the entire day slogging away with a 15–20 kilogram pack.

I recently conducted a straw poll of my walking friends. The consensus was that four to six hours of actual walking each day was about right. Hence slow walking rule number two—if it's more than four to six hours a day of walking, it isn't slow walking.

So, by adopting slow walking techniques, you can say farewell to the days of getting into camp at sunset and having to rush around finding water, setting up tents and cooking in the fading light with little time to enjoy the scenery.

Instead, say hello to starting your day sitting with a coffee on a sand bank by the Red River

estuary in Croajingolong, watching in fascination as a school of bream eat the marsh flies you've swatted and tossed into the water. Say hello to ending your day sitting on a rock on the crest of the Jaitmathangs (formerly known as the Yit-Ma-Thangs in Wild) in the Victorian Alps, sipping wine and watching the sun drop over Mt Feathertop.

## Next time...three extraordinary places to take a slow walk



The Torres del Paine circuit in Chile is a great destination to do a slow walk. Gil Hays

Walking can take you to some of the most beautiful, wild and precious places on the planet. But it is often only with the benefit of hindsight that you realise just where you needed to plan to spend that extra day or two. Three extraordinary places that came, and then went, far too quickly for me are listed below. If you're planning a visit, and you can afford it, slot in some extra time when you go.

### Zoe Falls: Hinchinbrook Island, Queensland

Coming from the north on the four-day Thorsborne Trail, you will first walk along beautiful Zoe Bay to the campsite by the beach. It is a lovely spot that gets better once you've dumped your heavy pack, checked for crocs and then walked up to the deep pool at the base of the nearby waterfall for a swim. We spent a while at that pool, loving the place, before returning to the campsite to cook ourselves dinner. The next day, after a slow start, we walked back to the pool and then up the path to the plateau at the top of the waterfall. If the day before was beautiful, this was spectacular. The crystal clear waters of the creek formed a series of short cascades and azure swimming holes surrounded by sun-drenched rocks. The perfect place for swimming and sunbathing. In the distance, the view of the beach and the bay opened up. We called the place 'Gods Falls', because this must surely be where the deity hung out. A friend proposed to his girlfriend there on a later trip. Whether you are interested in romance or not, if you are planning a trip, make sure you allow plenty of time to soak up the beauty of this magnificent spot.

### Hugh Gorge: Larapinta Trail, Northern Territory

We had the heads-up on this one. A friend said to camp, not at the water source at the entrance to the gorge, but a few kilometres further up, at Hugh Gorge Junction, where the track climbs out and up to Rocky Saddle. Despite the tip, a mix-up with our cooking gas at Ellery Creek set us back half a day. Arriving late, we camped at the water spot and had to settle for breakfast at the junction the next day. But what a spot for breakfast! Surrounded by towering red cliffs, ghost gums and sunburnt termite mounds, this place lingers in the memory. With some planning around water, you could easily spend a while here, exploring the northern end of the gorge, scaling the high cliffs or just kicking back with a cup of tea at dusk and listening to the dingoes howl.

### Grey Glacier: Torres del Paine Circuit, Chile

There are a few places in the world where, no matter how many people tell you how amazing they are, and no matter how many photos you see in advance, you're still blown away when you see them for the first time. Grey Glacier is one of them. We'd been told that the view of the glacier, after slogging up to John Gardner Pass, was incredible. It was all of that, and more. The glacier's sheer presence was incredible. A sea of ice with the pause button pushed, freezing the crests and troughs. You could sit and watch it for hours. I did. You should. But try to take an extra day to relax, walk out to the glacier's edge, or maybe even arrange an ice walk on the glacier from the Lago Grey hut.



With slow walking, you'll have more time to immerse yourself in the places you've walked to. You can indulge your 'Into the Wild' fantasies by spending hours unsuccessfully trying to catch fish and find bush tucker. You can sit and watch the goannas, seals and wattlebirds, marvel for hours at Indigenous rock art, swim and sunbake nude on a deserted beach or just kick back and revere nature.

In addition to giving you more time to savour the wild places of this world, slow walking has other advantages. Because you spend less time with your pack on your back, you can afford to carry more. Suddenly you can get excited about slipping some of those 'luxury' walking items into the pack; the walking chair, the extra bottle of wine, the vac-sealed olives and maybe even a copy of *Sex in a Tent* (you don't want to waste any of your new-found time, after all).

With more time, you'll have the flexibility to change track and handle the unexpected. Flexibility to wait for the tide and currents to subside at the mouth of the Wangan River so you can walk across rather than swim (or, in our case, wait for a friendly fisherman to pop up with his tinnie to ferry us across).

A couple of years back, in the Los Glaciares National Park in Argentine Patagonia, we had four days to do the fabled Monte FitzRoy Circuit. This left us no time to wait out the notorious weather that often shrouds the incredible peaks there. We lucked it with Monte FitzRoy but missed out on seeing Cerro Torre up close and cloud free. With an extra day, we'd have

date, meaning that we only had eight days to do the Torres Circuit and the two unmissable side trips. As a result, we had to sandwich two stages into one mammoth day that ended with us arriving at the incredible Lago Dickson campsite just before sunset (and the summer sun sets very late in Patagonia). The next day, packing up the tent, with stiff and sore legs and a hard

arrange the flight to the Vinson Massif in Antarctica and had some spare days to quickly see the Torres in the meanwhile.

The truth is, a slower pace on a walk is both a blessing and a curse. By taking things slowly, spending multiple nights in places and spending less time walking, you naturally can't get as far in as many days. It's a difficult trade-off. Do you want to cover more distance and see more areas? Or do you want more time to savor the amazing places you're seeing?

Don't fret. The answer to this dilemma is surprisingly simple—just take more time off work and enjoy the best of both worlds.

This leads to my third and final rule of slow walking—find a job that lets you take more than four weeks annual leave. Leave without pay, RDOs, unemployment and early retirement are all recommended options to facilitate slow walking.

About two months back, as I contemplated writing this article on slow walking, Malli, my Indian acquaintance from the Torres, popped into my head. I wondered how he had gone



## Perhaps most importantly, slow walking gives you a wonderful sense of smug satisfaction and leisure.

been able to wait out the weather and see the mountain in all its glory.

Perhaps most importantly, slow walking gives you a wonderful sense of smug satisfaction and leisure. You can wake up at a reasonable hour—the best time being just when any other walkers in the campsite are finishing packing and getting ready to leave. While brewing a coffee, you can contemplate where to explore on a day walk rather than face packing up the tent. Better still, you can then enjoy the jealous look on the faces of the other walkers when you casually explain that you're having a 'rest day', starting with a lazy morning swim at the magnificent deserted beach close by.

I know this jealous look well. I gave it to a couple of Canadians on the Torres del Paine Circuit in Chile. Disregarding all my rules on slow walking, I had booked a ferry on a certain

day's walk ahead of us, the two friendly Canadians explained happily that they were having a rest day and were off to wander up to the majestic Dickson Glacier on a day walk.

On the same walk, over lunch at the beautiful Puesto Serón hut, I met the antithesis of slow walking—a friendly and hardy Indian man by the name of Malli Mastan Babu. I nonchalantly mentioned that we were in the middle of covering two stages in one day—over 30 kilometres with full packs. He told us he was doing the entire circuit in two and half days! Our curiosity grew when he said he was heading to Australia in a couple of months, to go to Thredbo of all places. Before he downed a litre of orange juice and set off, he lingered long enough to explain that he had just started his quest to become the first Indian to conquer the seven continental summits. He was waiting to



The author smouldering in the Torres del Paine, an area he wished he had allowed more time to explore. *Kim de Kreter* **Left**, the remarkable Grey Glacier in the Torres del Paine; see it before it melts away! *Grant Dixon*

with his summit quest and remembered he'd said he had a web site. I looked him up on [www.1stindian7summits.com](http://www.1stindian7summits.com). Sure enough, not only had he climbed all seven peaks, he had done so in the fastest time ever. An incredible achievement. Good luck to him, I thought. For me, for now, I'll take the slow road. 

At age ten Hugh de Kreter camped in the backyard for a week; at 18, it was cans of chilli con carne on the Overland Track. Now, at 34, he still loves the bush, minus the cans, and is an experienced exponent of the bushwalking holiday.

# Call Your **Bluff**



Jonny Hughes fording the Crossing River on their retreat back to the Port Davey Track. Right, energy levels plummet after a few rounds of 'scrub bashing'. Jonny can't even muster up a smile for the camera. All uncredited photos by Andrew Hughes

## Andrew Hughes and his brother Jonny do some circle work in the scrub of South-west Tasmania

IT'S STARTING TO MAKE SENSE. THE LEECH bite behind my knee weeps blood through the Band-Aid and begins to itch. Bruises along every centimetre of shin bone are settling from fiery red to tender brown. Microscopic silicon crystals, left behind by cutting-grass fronds swishing past my nose and forearm, continue to sting despite barely a mark left behind. Blowflies bang about ridiculously inside the vestibule. Bzzz, thump, bzzz, thump, bzz, bzz. I lay the book across my chest and absently flick at the six-legged shadows when they land on the thin inner fabric. The satisfaction of finally being away from their probing snouts makes me giggle and sigh. For now the torment is over and I'm safe in the tent. Jonny is similarly cocooned a few metres away. 'How's it going over there, tiger? Everything sorted?' I query.

'All good. Let's wait for these flies to piss off before we cook.'

I agree, and return to reading and flicking flies. Turning another page, I discover why we are out here, why we are hiding in small tents from

insects, aching and bleeding in the bush. In 1976 Richard Dawkins wrote *The Selfish Gene*, possibly in a small office in an Oxford University reading room. Thirty-one years later, in a parallel universe, I lie reading his words with my head propped up by a raincoat—and it's all starting to make sense.

'We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes', I read. I ask Jonny if he had been aware of this when he'd agreed to come for a walk. He hadn't. Nor, I am informed, does he understand a word of what I am saying and can I please stop talking as his feet hurt. Not having reached the chapter on aggression, and feeling weary, I lay the book back on my chest and fall asleep for an hour before dinner.

Two days previously we had driven down to the Huon Campground at the southern end of Lake Pedder. The track leading south lures many walkers into the Western or Eastern Arthur Ranges. A few, like us, skip around the western end of the Western Arthur and down the Port Davey Track. Our destination for day one was partway down, at Crossing River. West of the river is the untracked wilderness of the White Monolith Range and the tantalising Greystone Bluff.

'Greystone, the legend of Tarzan', I murmur, peering over the furry plains to distant, shadowy hulks.

'GreySTOKE, the legend of Tarzan', Jonny corrects me, and adds, 'So what are we doing, White Monoliths or Greystone?' The plan beyond



Crossing River is vague. We want—well, we don't know exactly what we want. Something other than cars, deadlines, special offers and mobile phones, and all the people who drive, dispense, spruik and use them. Studying the plains—glancing from map to reality as it spreads before us—there is potential. Potential good, potential bad. Sometimes the map shows us obstacles that our eyes can't see from a distance: hidden waterways or thick scrub that looks deceptively like an easy walking carpet. In combination with first-hand observation, we begin to know



the land. 'Let's go over the plains at the foot of the White Monoliths to the base of Greystone, camp for a couple of nights and knock off a few peaks as day trips', I suggest.

Jonny trusts me. He thinks my proposal must be feasible because I've been here before. The fault lies in his assumption that I have a memory. I don't. At least, not a good one. Not for bauera and cutting-grass swamps, or banksia and melaleuca thickets. Certainly not for fly-blown plains and sweaty eyeballs. These memories have faded with time. They melt away amongst the twisted quartzite spires inked orange with the eight o'clock sun. They are subsumed by the cool silence of dawn pouring off flinty peaks and through awakening valleys. Dawkins simplifies it this way:

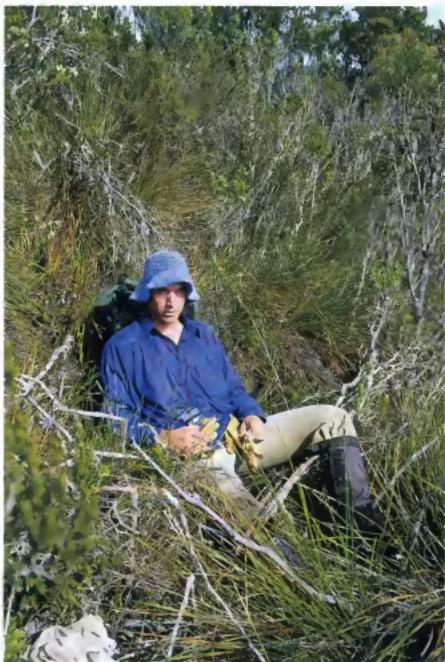
*Here is a list of things defined as rewarding: sweet taste in mouth, orgasm, mild temperature, smiling child. And here is a list of nasty things: various sorts of pain, nausea, empty stomach, screaming child. If you should happen to do something that is followed by one of the nasty things, don't do it again, but on the other hand repeat anything that is followed by one of the nice things.*

In other words, by suppressing the painful pricks and leaden legs of scrub-bashing, I can focus on the greater reward of—wait a second—nice-

looking rocks and quiet valleys? What about orgasms and mild temperatures? Maybe I've missed something. It doesn't seem to add up.

Just before its waters are lost to the Crossing, the Dodd River is a respectable stubble of eucalypts hiding an unspoken rash of bauera and cutting grass. Twenty minutes after leaving the track, and slightly (excruciatingly) off course, we sit on a fallen log, panting and dripping pathetically. 'Where's the river?' asks Jonny, with more than a hint of 'What have I become involved in this time?' in his voice.

'It must be close', I reply, unbuckling my pack and unsuccessfully trying to climb up the log for a better look around. The ground does not



**From left to right,** Mt Robinson in the background provides a handy reference point for the retreat to the Port Davey Track; Jonny is all smiles with the worst of it over. The author finds a nook in the button grass to dry out and prepare for the retreat after calling it quits on the attempt up Greystone Bluff. *Jonathon Hughes* Elegance is forgotten as Jonny launches into a band of bauera.

exist on this river bank. We walk, fall, push and squeeze through on an elevated mat of tangled green and brown. Below that we assume there is nothing. Jonny's foot plunges through the void and sends him crashing sideways. I listen and understand but don't turn around—he'll find his way back up. The river appears suddenly, a reddish-brown serpent massaging its slippery belly over rounded white cobbles. Thank goodness. We slip noisily over the bank and stand in the water, stick in hand, already probing for a path downstream. It varies from ankle to waist deep, from broad and clear to narrow and choked with logs. Always it is better than the scrub. We follow it with determination and shrinking testicles.

Tufts of button grass on the bank, signalling a break in the vegetation, mean that it's time to drag ourselves on to the plains. We emerge, dripping and cautious, under the bulk of Sculptured Mountain. Jonny's gloves are shredded. Instead of four days, they have lasted less than four hours. Holding up my leather gloves and turning them provocatively, I say: 'Told you so, eh, not worth a pinch of shit in this stuff.' He doesn't argue. Feeling petty, I decide, for my gene's sake, not to do that again. It doesn't make evolutionary sense to be a tosser.

Needing another five kilometres to put us within striking distance of Greystone Bluff, we are far from finished with the dirty business. Our job is to steer through a mixture of light and thick heath, intersected by creeks draining off the range and dappled with pockets of trees. Picking the easiest path in this type of country is essential. Midday ticks by as I grope into another clogged creek bed. We need to replace lost fluids. Is this one run, or will it be dry like the last one? Jonny tries further down, keen to find water. A muffled 'Found some!' drifts grubbily through the thicket. 'Actually, I've landed in it...upside down...Think I'll be right, though.'

Sometimes there is no easy path. I pause to break the bauera tentacles wrapped around my torso. There are different ways to deal with this pervasive person-trap. Push, snap, stomp, lean, lie or slash it. However you tackle it, you'll be sweating pure hatred by the day's end. I console myself with Dawkins's wisdom:

To a survival machine (me), another survival machine (bauera) is part of its environment, like a rock or a river or a lump of food. It is something that gets in the way, or something that can be exploited. It differs from a rock or a river in one important respect: it is inclined to hit back.

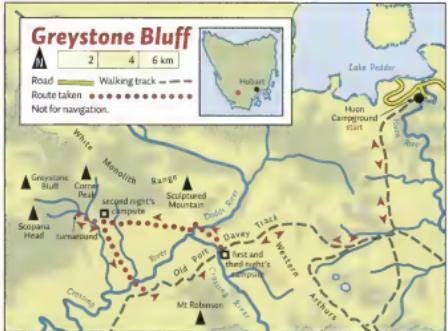
So it's a fair fight between us. I can't blame bauera for being tenacious and mean-spirited. It can't blame me for bashing it up. Luckily for both of us, we don't have reason to do battle very often. Though I can imagine the day when I'm swallowed whole and never spat out.

'Why are there more flies around me?' I ask Jonny as we settle on a slab of rock for lunch. 'Do you think it's because I smell more, or less, or

on the side of a nondescript hill, below a little-known mountain of dubious character. I can't take solace in Dawkins's ideas because increasingly I suspect that I don't understand them. Instead I point out to Jonny: 'Folk wisdom tells us that the destination is not important, my friend; it's the journey that counts. The top of Greystone Bluff isn't the point; how we arrived on the side of this hill is all that matters.'

Neither of us bothers to mention that the journey has been peppered with torment, ill-temper, impatience and bouts of pettiness. So, with no solace to be found on the physical peak and little to be found in the metaphysical journey, we plot our escape to the Port Davey Track. Distance from the scene of our undignified squabble with the South-west might be the best balm.

We veer away from the foothills of the White Monolith Range and take a middling path towards Crossing River. Mt Robinson, south of the Western Arthurs, is our compass. There is little resistance. It's as if the protective forces of Greystone Bluff—the dark angels of the bush—are as happy to assist our exit as they were determined to impede our entry. Arriving back at the river, further south and in half the time, the healing has begun. In the corner of the river a large pool has formed. Flowering tea trees line the bank like the first snow of autumn. Single white petals map out the whispered flow of the opaque pool. We traverse the bank until the petals are hurried along and it is shallow enough for us to cross. 'Less flies', Jonny notes, as we take pause to refill both our bottles and the gracious corners of our minds.



is it the blue shirt—the terry towelling, maybe?' I continue mumbling away, swatting tersely to guard my cheese.

'Probably because you smell like a wombat', Jonny concludes. The drone of hundreds of blowflies begins to unravel my already stretched patience. 'This is ridiculous', I spit out angrily before bellowing: 'THIS IS RIDICULOUS. LEAVE...ME...ALONE!' I rip my hat off and slash wildly around my head for a full minute. Jonny regards me curiously as I slump back down and continue to eat.

Towards the end of the plain—and the day—a low, detached hill draws us up for a look. The ridges leading up Scoparia Head and continuing to Greystone Bluff don't inspire confidence. To our right is Corner Peak on the White Monolith Range, and a similarly daunting buttress of delicious filth. We are here, within striking distance, exhausted but ready. Tomorrow we will stand on Greystone Bluff, thus creating—"The Legend of Flystroke". First, however, we must hide in our tents.

'Abort. We're not going to make it, mate. Let's cut our losses and get out of here', Jonny says. The next morning has seen paltry progress up the first step, not even on to the target ridge. We're still far from the turnaround time, but what he says is true. We're not going to make it. Outwardly I feign frustration: 'Aw, c'mon. What if just punch through this band and see what happens. It might open up.'

But inwardly I'm relieved and concede the hollowness of my protest. Sleep came too quickly last night and didn't last long enough. The mixed button grass heath is snatched away to a tangled wall of wickedness. There is no obvious way through, no secret password or back door. With loiter in our step and lethargy across our shoulders, it's clear that we don't have the raw energy or motivation to proceed. Still, accepting the reality of defeat is not easy. Sitting down to chew on a button grass stem, I ruminate on our situation. Two and a half days to reach a scrubby perch



The mixed button grass heath is snatched away to a tangled wall of wickedness. There is no obvious way through, no secret password or back door.

Our genes, a collective of successful replicators, combining together to create this thing we define as an individual, produce behaviour that will best realise the continuation of those genes. The individual—Dawkins's so-called 'survival machine'—dies sooner or later. What it does while it lives either advances the genes' cause or hinders it. Driving along the dirt road, wondering about what we'd done with our last four days, we couldn't decide. Were our genes happy with our walk in the bush? Were they hanging out at DNA headquarters, discussing the fallout? As Jonny pointed out: 'We didn't get above 300 metres, we didn't get out of the scrub, we walked around in a bloody big circle and, frankly, it was absurd, completely ridiculous and utterly nonsensical.' I had to agree. Being brothers, we share 50 per cent of our genes. Perhaps we have defective genes? Or, more of a worry, absurd, ridiculous, nonsensical genes? If I ever finish Dawkins's book, I'll let you know.

Andrew Hughes is a teacher who finds himself in the bush, on the road, or in the water more than the classroom. Based under the ever inspiring Mt Wellington in Hobart, he plots new adventures to share with students through [www.expeditionclass.com](http://www.expeditionclass.com).



## ***Northern Exposure***

*Michael Polychronopoulos captures some of the unique alpine landscapes of North America*

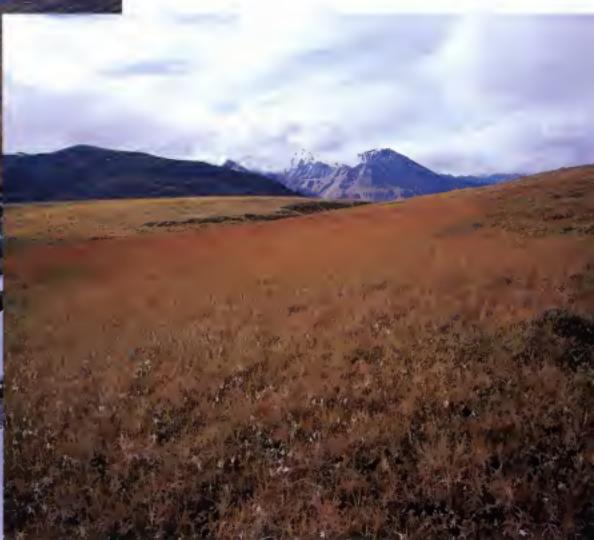
Rain clouds sweep over the Mendenhall Glacier, an outlet of the Juneau Icefield, Tongass National Forest, South-east Alaska, USA.

*Right*, a storm clears over the Alaska Range with the Muldrow Glacier in the distance, Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska.





Michael Polychronopoulos is a civil engineer based in Melbourne. When he has the opportunity, he enjoys exploring the wilderness and alpine environments of Alaska and Canada. Closer to home he is often drawn to Tasmania's South-west.



Early Autumn rain saturates the ground near Mt Eielson, Denali National Park and Preserve. Left, Mt Monolith casts an ominous presence over Divide Lake, Tombstone Territorial Park, Yukon, Canada.

# In the footsteps of Tchingal

Michael Hampton describes some adventures in one of the least visited and most beautiful ranges in Victoria



**IN WESTERN VICTORIA THERE IS A SPECIAL** place where the vast plains and blue sky of the outback meet the familiar forested hills that are more typically Victorian. These hills are rugged and ancient, the sandstone a worn remnant of a primeval seabed, 400 to 450 million years old, predating life. Over millions of years, pressure created a fine quartzite. Surface tension caused buckling, exposing the rock to weathering. For aeons these rocks have endured the elements, baked under the scorching sun, fretted by the relentless south-westerlies that blow off the Southern Ocean, at times surrounded by shallow seas. There are deep, ferny gorges with waterfalls and high plateaus where snow often falls in winter. Explorers will find labyrinths, natural arches, freestanding towers and numerous wind-weathered caves and overhangs. Wildlife abounds, and Indigenous rock-art sites provide a link with the past. Indeed,

parts of this range feature in Koori legends, such as the story of Tchingal the emu.

The Victoria (or Billawin, its Indigenous name) Range forms the south-western corner of the Grampians. It is isolated from the other ranges by the beautiful Victoria Valley, from where the major western river system, the Glenelg, commences its journey to the sea at the far off Victorian-South Australian border. The best way to appreciate the size and ruggedness of the Victoria Range is from the nearby Henty Highway, at mid-to-late afternoon when the sun is bright but the air is cool. Many of the destinations mentioned are obvious from here, including the Fortress and the Chimney Pots.

My first visit to the Victoria Range was in 1984 when I met some climbing buddies at the Chimney Pots. It seemed like the middle of nowhere. We didn't have a climbing guide, but found a friendly little crag in the scrub. Six years later,

a bunch of friends and I began an exploration and first-ascent bonanza that still continues, albeit with varying group members and intensity. Recording hundreds of first ascents and exploring a remote and truly wonderful part of the Grampians have been equally enjoyable rewards. In writing this article, I haven't set out to provide detailed track notes, but rather to draw the adventurous and inquisitive reader's attention, with local history to add spice. Happy exploring!

## When to go

The best time to go exploring is in the cooler months. In late autumn, winter and early spring there's abundant water and wearing long pants and gaiters is not uncomfortable. Although the days are short, the winter light brings out the best hues, and most biting airborne pests are dormant. A lightweight rain fly should provide adequate shelter.

# exploring the Victoria Range

arts of the Grampians—Gariwerd National Park



A panoramic view of Hollow Mountain, one of the Victoria Range's remarkable big caves and a favourite spot for walkers to explore. All photos by the author

## Safety/warnings

Only seasoned walkers with good navigation skills should venture deep into the range. Many of these walks entail easy rock scrambling in exposed positions where a fall may result in serious injury or death. It is recommended that parties carry a short (25 metre) length of climbing rope, some slings and karabiners and have knowledge of anchor set-up and belaying. Although many walkers will feel comfortable, do not climb anything beyond your limit. In particular, tread very carefully after rain as the rock gets slippery. Rescue from this area would be prolonged and traumatic.

## Maps

The best maps are the now out of print 1:25 000 Vicmap series. The sheets Victoria Gap, Victoria

Ronge, Woohpoor, Moorallo, Bullowin and Korobool cover the whole range. A replacement 1:50 000 series, in particular the Thockeroi sheet, covers much of the middle section of the range. Unfortunately, this map has to be one of the worst ever published. Information from the 1:25 000 maps (now out of date by at least 20 years) has been carried over to this new map, obviously without any field checking. Unfortunately, the *Southern Grampians 1:50 000 Outdoor Leisure Series* map doesn't include the range's western half (where most of these walks are). One approach is to visit the Department of Sustainability & Environment's web site and click on the Mapshare or Vicmap links: for a small fee you can create your own maps, similar in detail to the 1:25 000 sheets. Or go straight to [www.land.vic.gov.au](http://www.land.vic.gov.au)

## Access, camping and water

From Melbourne, follow the Western Highway to Halls Gap, drive up Mount Victory Road and take the Glenelg River Road. Follow this to Strachans camping area, then Chimney Pots Gap and eventually the Henty Highway at Woohpoor. (Strachans can also be approached via Red Hill or Jensens Road from Victoria Valley and Mirranatwa, easily reached from Dunkeld on the Glenelg Highway.) To access Buandik camping area, the major Koori art sites and the western side of the range (including the Fortress walk), follow the above directions to the Glenelg River Road, head right on Lodge Road to Victoria Gap and Red Rocks Road, which becomes the Harrop Track. From Hamilton or Horsham take the Henty Highway and access the range via Bilywing Road or the Glenelg River Road.

There are two dedicated, vehicle-accessible campsites in the Victoria Range: Buandik in the west and Strachans in the east. There is reliable water in the creek for most of the year at Strachans. Many creeks dry up in summer and autumn. Plan your activities for the wetter months or bring your own water. Some of the best water points have recently been locked up by catchment management authorities. The most reliable of these is Gap Creek, west of Chimney Pots Gap.

### The walks

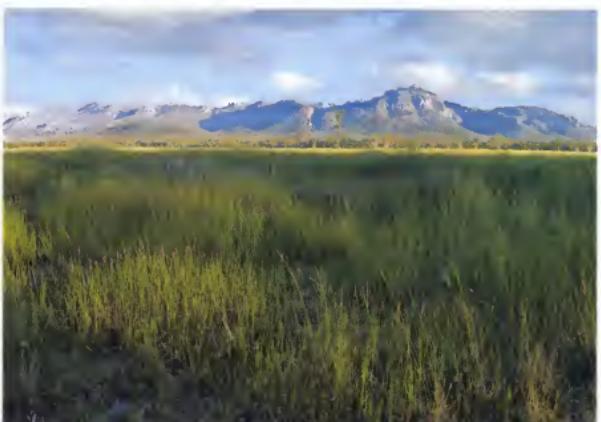
#### Red Rock labyrinths

Red Rock, at the northern end of the range, is simply one of the most scenic areas in the Grampians. Beyond the derelict paddocks, heavily stocked with kangaroos and emus, the hillsides are dotted with an exotic array of pinnacles,

arches, waterfalls and scrub. It continues to amaze me what you stumble across in these places. I've found bits of old hawser-laid rope, obviously used to descend a steep rock slab and left behind by a walking party. There are rocks cunningly stacked to enhance natural barricades and keep sheep from straying deep into the bush. The most bizarre piece of rubbish

#### Buandik

This area was obviously the 'cradle' of the range, with four major creeks issuing from the mountains within a few kilometres. The open woodlands to the west—much of it red gum before being flattened for pine plantations—would have been an excellent food bowl for the Indigenous inhabitants whose culture is evident



## The story of Tchingal the emu

Following initial contact with Europeans in 1836, the demise of the Indigenous groups whose territory encompassed the Grampians (people of the Djab wurrung and Jardwadjali language groups) was quite swift. Even as early as 1870, surviving Jardwadjali on Glenist Station expressed ignorance of the nearby Billimina shelter and its art. However, one legend that survived is that of Bunjil the creator, the Bram-brambult brothers and a ferocious giant emu called Tchingal. Bunjil ascended to the sky to become a star and appointed the two brothers to finish the task of sorting things out on earth. Tchingal, who lived on the flesh of people and animals, was hatching a giant egg in the mallee scrub. War the crow happened upon the unattended egg and gave it a peck. Tchingal returned, catching War red-handed, and became absolutely furious. The crow fled toward the ranges, the emu in hot pursuit. War saw a crack in the mountain and flew into it, thinking he'd be safe. Tchingal charged, delivering a mighty blow to the mountain with his foot. The mountain split and a stream issued from the gap. This was called Barigar, and is now known as Roses Gap.

War fled through Barigar and flew west, finding another crack and again trying to hide. Again Tchingal let fly with his mighty foot, and once more the mountain split right open. The resulting massive clef where the Glenelg River (Bugara) passes on to the western plains (and now into Rocklands Reservoir) is called Victoria Gap. It was also called Jananginj Njau, meaning 'the sun will go'.

Eventually, the Bram-brambult brothers speared the giant emu. Mortally wounded, Tchingal staggered off to the north-west, leaving a large trail of blood which became the Wimmera River. Many people came to feast on the giant bird. On plucking Tchingal, the wise brothers split the feathers and made two smaller piles. These they made into two smaller emus. They told the emus to lay many small eggs rather than one large egg. Visit the Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Halls Gap to learn more about this and other stories.

is an old goat feeder under a steep crag on the south side of Muline Creek. This was carried up and assembled by locals at the request of scientists who had rediscovered a colony of the endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*). Unfortunately, the colony continued to decline and the last specimen was trapped and placed into a captive breeding program. There are 59 extinct colony sites in the Grampians alone. Very recently, rock wallabies were re-released at an undisclosed site in the Grampians.

A good destination is Red Rock Peak (Victoria Gap GR 126805). Approach by Muline Creek or the northern branch of Red Rock Creek, or 'straight up the guts' from the firebreak at the northern end of the paddocks. Although climbers visit many of the cliffs hereabouts, and there are many animal pads to follow, expect a big day out and leave early. The views are worth the effort.

in the art on rocky outcrops and boulders. From Buandik camping area, a pleasant 'tourist style' walking track visits the Cultivation Creek falls and the Billimina art site, located on a huge overhanging boulder. A more adventurous trek would be to rock hop up Cultivation Creek from the falls. A kilometre or so upstream, past a second set of falls, are major falls over rock slabs. Looking downstream from the top of these falls, the V-shaped valley is framed by the massive, orange expanse of Rain Wall on the right and a smaller, closer crag on the left. On the horizon is the Fortress.

#### Hollow Mountain and Red Cave

The Red Cave is easily seen from the Buandik massif or the Harrop Track. Long known and visited by bushwalkers, it is the largest roof in Australia to be free climbed. In the same valley and facing Red Cave to the north is Hollow Mountain (not to be confused with the Hollow

Mountain at Mt Stapylton). Red Cave (Victoria Range GR 145753) is huge, with a gaping hole at the back, whereas the cave at Hollow Mountain (GR 146757) is deep and low, almost claustrophobic in comparison.

Accessing Hollow Mountain is simple. From the toilet block at Buandik camping area, cross the road and start up the broad ridge opposite.

Large, natural arch, Hole in the Wall is only visible from certain points to the north and south. It's marked as point 714 (Victoria Range GR 162727). Victoria Range Road near Mt Thackeray comes within two scrubby kilometres of this feature. A visit to Hole in the Wall would ideally include an exploration of the northern branch of Deep Creek. Parties have also approached from Hut

track ends near the creek. From here there is a faint and intermittent pad, but progress is mostly made by rock hopping up the creek. Expect to take more than double your estimated travel time as there are detours to bypass waterfalls and much scrambling. After about two kilometres there is a major tributary on the left (Victoria Range GR 149718). This is the northern branch of



**Clockwise from above**, the mighty Red Cave near Buandik. The Fortress massif dominates the skyline above the southern branch of Deep Creek. Ming Ming swamp and the Victoria Range beyond. Emu eggs, no doubt laid by a descendant of Tchingal. Bathing in a rock hole near Red Rock.



After about 100 metres, pick up a distinct walking track that follows the spur east, mostly on its northern aspect, and leads all the way to the cave. Keep an eye out for the final scramble to the right—if you follow the vague pad continuing east along the outcrop you will miss the cave. Hollow Mountain isn't obvious on the approach, but once you're there, Red Cave is—it's directly opposite. There isn't a track to Red Cave but the scrub is fairly light. Head downhill to cross the creek, then ascend towards the left (east) end of the Red Cave outcrop. Walk back west along slabs to the top of a narrow chasm. Step across this and find the terrace that leads around the north side to the mouth of the cave. This scramble is quite exposed, so take care.

#### Hole in the Wall

This elusive feature (well, it took me two tries to find it!) is located high on the ridge between Hut Creek and the Deep Creek catchments. A

Creek and the Hut Creek track: this is a pretty solid (and often scrubby) climb and probably better descended, either on a circuit taking in Deep Creek or by walking through from Mt Thackeray. When walking up from Deep Creek, a major block on the south bank of the creek indicates where to begin following the cliffline uphill. The saddle between Hole in the Wall and the next outcrop provides a very sheltered campsite.

#### Billywing Gorge

The appropriately named Deep Creek has a large catchment in the heart of the range. Exploring this untracked gorge is slow but rewarding. The main attractions are waterfalls and deep pools flanked by rugged walls of orange rock, and the remote feel. Many parties explore Billywing Gorge as part of a round trip including the Fortress, with access to the former as for the latter. Instead of turning up the signposted track at 700 metres (see below), continue until the old management

Deep Creek (unacknowledged on maps). Follow this if you wish to get closer to Hole in the Wall and Mt Thackeray. If you are going to (or returning from) the Fortress, take the south branch.

#### The Fortress

This is a Grampians classic and by far the best-known walk in the range. The Fortress and its distinctive, detached Passport Buttress dominate the skyline in the heart of the range. While logging activities opened up the easier eastern approach from the Victoria Range Road, walkers forged a foot track from the west. The track head is at Deep Creek on the Harrop Track. A sandy management track leads up the valley. After roughly 700 metres, a signposted track heads off uphill to the right. This climbs to the ridge line and heads south-east until opposite the Fortress. Check out the view from the rock outcrops, before descending to a major creek. Walk up this to Oasis camp (formally known as the Western camping cave). The track continues upstream, then ascends between rock outcrops to the crags of the Fortress proper. For a short detour, follow the cliffs around south to check out the impressive western wall of the summit block and Passport Buttress.

Nearly a kilometre of easy walking brings us to the Eastern camping cave. With an overnight pack, allow more than two hours to reach Oasis camp, and another hour to Eastern camping cave. From here the track descends quickly to a creek (reliable water) and a four-wheel-drive track. This can be followed to the Victoria Range Road, accessible by four-wheel drives.

Scrambling to the top of the Fortress summit block is an adventure in itself; approach from gullies on the north-eastern toe. The easiest way up is by an exposed right-to-left traverse

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(facing the cliff) on the eastern side to the south-east ridge, then up more easily.

A popular circuit is to follow Victoria Range Road to Mt Thackeray, continuing to Hut Creek Track. Descend this, steeply at first, and follow it down a lovely valley back to Harrop Track. There's a good campsite at Mt Thackeray, and a well-defined track to the summit.

### The Chimney Pots

The Chimney Pots is one of the most impressive crags in the Grampians. This temple-like rock massif overlooks the only low gap in the Victoria Range, where the Glenelg River Road passes from east to west. This is a good, steep walk that will while away a few hours, with impressive views to the south-west as the reward. From the signposted car park just off the Glenelg River Road (near Chimney Pots Gap), the walking track cuts across the slope, then ascends to the base of the enormous south-west face. Follow the base of the cliff around west to the northern side and scramble on to a large platform. This is not the actual summit, which requires a tricky scramble up a gully; however, the panoramic views are just as good. Continue following the track around to the east side and descend to rejoin the track taken on the way up. Another nice walk nearby is to the Mountain Lion. Look for the signpost to the west of Chimney Pots Gap where a distinct walking track leads to the crag.

### Hindu Kush

This large cliff (Mooralta GR 080596) is on the skyline opposite the Chimney Pots. There are other features here with names like the Turret and Ferret Hill. A highlight of visiting these cliffs is the awesome view across the valley back to the Chimney Pots. As the name implies, a fairly long walk is required. A vague pad exists, but this is essentially off-track walking through light scrub and rocky terrain.

### Brown Creek Gorge

Tucked away in the deep south of the range is a gorge (Mooralta GR 092515) with parallel walls 30 metres apart running for a few hundred metres. Near the entrance an elegant waterfall cascades in from the side, providing a fine mist for the green ferns that choke the gully floor. Nearly all the major creeks south of Camp Creek have been subjected to water harvesting, which is piped to the nearby rural centre of Hamilton. The result is a network of weirs, water races and associated plumbing—and, of course, access tracks, in most cases only open to management vehicles. The track into Brown Creek is the longest of these, roughly four kilometres to the last weir. Take the right branch where the track forks, pass the weir and walk up next to the creek through light scrub. Where the creek forks stay right again; in about 700 metres the cliffs close in on either side. This is one of the few places in the Grampians where you can encounter leeches.

### McDonald Creek Gorge

This is a nice little gorge with a waterfall (after rain) on the creek south of Brown Creek. It's an easy walk due east from the firebreak behind the properties, and would be good to include in a two-day circuit taking in Brown Creek Gorge.

### The Western Swamps

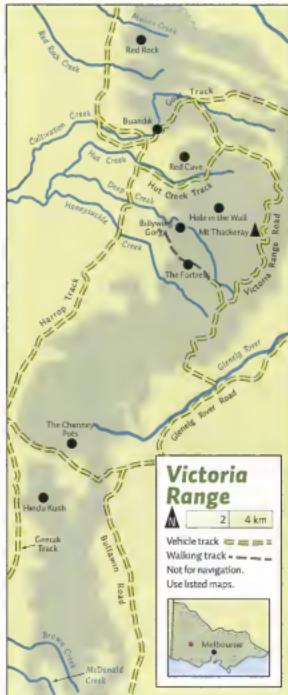
The major creeks draining the centre west of the range converge into a network of wetlands

with evocative, 'US deep south' names such as Kentucky, Bloodhound and Ming Ming Swamp. These creeks morph into Tea Tree Creek and then the Glenelg River, now part of Rocklands Reservoir (when it's full). These wetlands provide one of the more interesting and primeval landscapes in the Grampians, and are probably the closest we can get to experiencing the area's past as weather-beaten ramparts surrounded by shallow seas. The best access is from Old Billywing Road. This runs from Woorlpoor to join the Harrop Track at Grahams Creek, passing right next to Kentucky Swamp.

### Multiday walking options

As previously mentioned, the most popular multiday walk is the Deep Creek–Fortress–Victoria Range Road–Mt Thackeray–Hut Creek circuit. This is usually done over three or four days.

A good extended option would be to start at Woorlpoor and follow Old Billywing Road to Kentucky Swamp. Opposite the swamp a firebreak runs north, passing close to Bloodhound Swamp to its west, and joins Shilcock Track. Follow this



east to another intersection where Shilcock Track bends around to the south. Turn left, soon crossing Honeysuckle Creek, before reaching the Harrop Track in about one kilometre. Walk straight ahead to the start of the Deep Creek Track and the Fortress.

To make this a partial or full circuit, leave a vehicle at either the start or at Chimney Pots Gap. After reaching the Victoria Range Road

from the Fortress, turn right, then right again after 400 metres, and follow the Victoria Range Track to Chimney Pots Gap. The Glenelg River Road will take you back to the start.

For the experienced and adventurous, a traverse of the untracked southern section of the range, from Victoria Point to Chimney Pots Gap, would take four days. This should only be under-



Sharyn George walking in the lower main section of Deep Creek Gorge.

taken in late winter or spring when the creeks are flowing. Note that the extension of the Headworks Creek waterworks track is overgrown and should not be considered as an escape route.

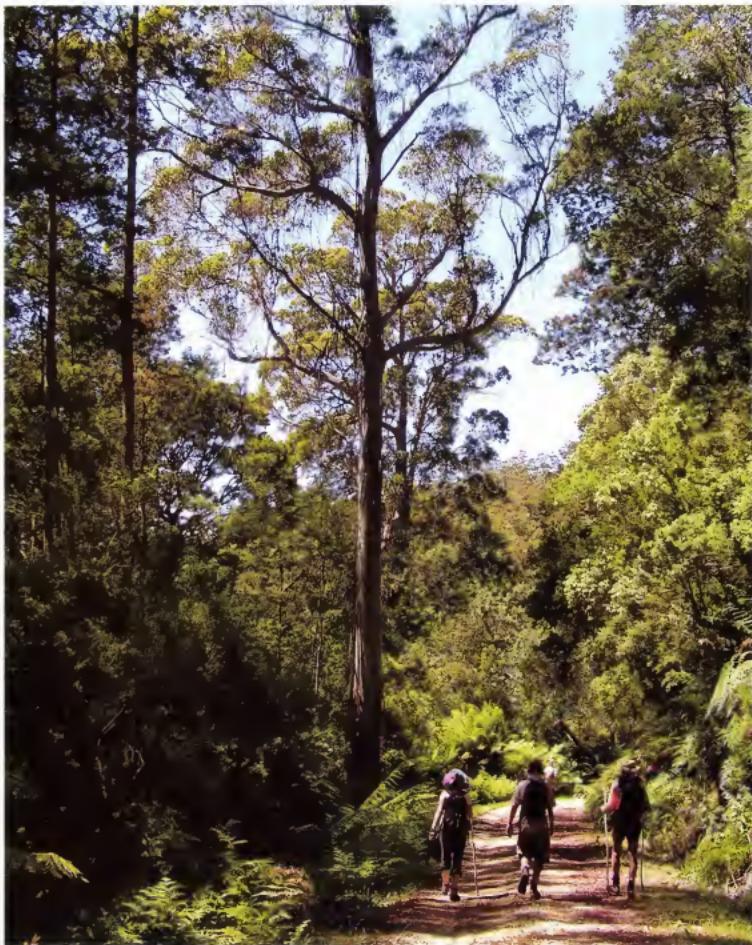
### A final note

Most of the logging of the eastern escarpment and plateau was done in the 1970s, but it continued right up to the transition to national park. This, and the establishment of the Billywing Pine plantation, have left a network of management tracks and often overgrown firebreaks. Water harvesting from all creeks south of Camp Creek created weirs, assorted plumbing, and more tracks. Many of these have become integral parts of the network. Others, such as the Victoria Range Road and Victoria Range Track, corrupt what could be one of the best wilderness areas in southern Australia. It would be amazing to see these roads closed off one day, leaving access only to those on foot.

Michael Hampton is a freelance outdoors pursuits instructor, photographer, illustrator and writer. A long-time resident of Murrindindi Shire, north-east of Melbourne, he spends way too much time exploring and climbing in the Grampians on the other side of the State.

# THE FORBIDDEN WALK: the Northeast Highlands Track

Lesley Nicklason outlines a controversial new seven-day walk in north-east Tasmania



TASMANIA'S NORTH-EAST HAS BEEN CALLED the 'forgotten corner'. This forgetfulness certainly applies to the region's status as a bush-walking destination, leaving many visitors surprised by the magnificence of the area's natural environment. The campaign for the protection of the area has been ongoing for more than 15 years, and a vital part has been the development of the Northeast Highlands Track, covering 80 kilometres from Mt Victoria to the Blue Tier. The walk winds in and out of a number of re-

serves—Mt Victoria, Frome, Blue Tier and Halls Falls—and it is the long-held wish of the local community to amalgamate these reserves into one national park.

What makes the walk so controversial is that much of the walk is in forests 'managed' by Forestry Tasmania for logging, which has actively discouraged the promotion of this walk. The track has been slowly developed over the last eight years, and walking it is now an annual event, open to anyone who wishes to join in. The first community walk was held in 2006 and attracted 40 walkers, with a core group of seven completing the walk. Since then the number of walkers completing it has steadily grown.



**Clockwise from far left,** walking Lehnars Ridge Road, Blue Tier foothills—threatened native forest. Ancient myrtle forest in the Rattler Range. Soft tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) surround Crystal Creek, Blue Tier. A brown tree frog. The campsite at Rattler Hill, another unprotected area.

All photos by the author

## The walk at a glance

Grade	Moderate, with some steep sections
Length	Seven days
Distance	80 kilometres
Type	End-to-end walk through Gondwanan forest, tall wet eucalypt and subalpine areas
Region	North-east Tasmania
Nearest towns	St Helens/Scottsdale
Start, finish	Mt Victoria walking track, Halls Falls
Maps	Victorio, Ringorooma, Derby, Spurrs Rivulet and Blue Tier Tasmaps
Best time	Can be done all year round, but summer is recommended

### Safety/warnings

As on any walk in Tasmania, be prepared for weather extremes. Make sure you have warm clothing and wet weather gear.

### Permits

The walk is unauthorised at present, so permits are not required.

### Access

The track starts on Mt Albert Road at the signposted Mt Victoria walking track, and is accessed from either Pyengana or Ringorooma, approximately two hours' drive from Launceston. The walk ends at Halls Falls, a ten-minute drive from the famous 'Pub in the Paddock' in Pyengana.

### The walk

**Mt Victoria to Ralph Falls: seven kilometres (four–five hours); moderate, with an optional hard climb to Mt Victoria's summit**

Take the formed track to Mt Victoria's summit, which climbs steadily through spectacular myrtle forest to the plateau. A side trip to the summit traverses a substantial boulder field, rewarding walkers with 360° views of the north-east highlands. Return to the plateau, turn right

The forests range from ancient Gondwanan rainforest to tall, wet eucalypt and subalpine areas, containing some real treasures: Tasmania's 'fattest' tree (a Blue Tier giant with a massive 19.4 metre girth), stunning waterfalls, unique rock formations and a huge range of understorey plants. Many of Tasmania's native wildlife species live here: quolls, wombats, echidnas, eastern barred bandicoots and the now critically-endangered Tasmanian devil.

In 1996, during the Regional Forest Agreement submission period, it was recommended that the Mt Victoria–Blue Tier area be given national park status (see history box for details). Unfortunately, this has not yet happened and the area continues to be fragmented by ongoing logging, with more than 90 per cent of logs exported as woodchips.

During the past eight years, the Northeast Highlands Track has been taking shape, covering 80 kilometres from Mt Victoria to the Blue Tier. The unique feature of this walk is that the campsites are located near old, rarely used roads, allowing it to be done with vehicle assistance. This minimises impact, as well as allowing walkers to enjoy the scenery carrying just a day pack. Those who prefer a wilderness experience can walk the track independently.

### When to go

Another great thing about the north-east is that the weather is much milder than in Tassie's other bushwalking destinations. The walk is possible at any time of the year, but is best done during summer when you can enjoy the magnificent flowering plants and refreshing swims in the many rivers and waterholes.

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and follow a taped track that skirts the contour and the western side of the mountain, traversing through open myrtle forest. There is plenty of water on the way. You should arrive at Ralph Falls picnic shelter with plenty of time to visit Ralph Falls before setting up camp. There is a toilet and water tank and plenty of room. In January, the entire plateau is covered in flowering mountain rocket.

## Day two

### Rattler Range: 16 kilometres (eight-nine hours); moderate

Follow the well-marked track to Cashs Gorge lookout, then pick up a taped track following the escarpment to tall rainforest. The walk stays on the ridgeline, passing through magnificent, open, ancient Gondwanan forest. Carry plenty of water as it may be scarce once you leave Cashs Gorge. Camp on Rattler Hill at the head of Cascade River. This campsite is out in the open and has a spectacular and uninterrupted view of the night sky—a great place to sleep out under the stars.

## Day three

### Rattler Hill to Maa Mon Chin Lake: 10 kilometres (five-six hours); easy-moderate, with rough track in places

Follow an old road (unmarked on the map) heading east to the trig point on Rattler Hill, giving 360° views of the entire north-east corner and islands of the Furneaux Group. Descend steeply

off track in a northerly direction beside a pine forest, before heading east again, entering the magical forests of Star of Peace. Skirt the western flank of the Star of Peace, reaching a grassy track which leads to your campsite on the banks of Maa Mon Chin Lake. This is a great spot for a cleansing swim and platypus spotting if you are lucky.

## Day four

### Maa Mon Chin Lake to Weld River: 13 kilometres (six-seven hours); moderate

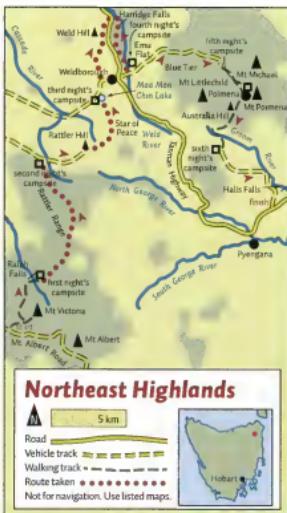
Leaving Maa Mon Chin Lake on the Mt Paris Dam Road, pass through Mutual Valley before descending Weld Hill to Harridge Falls. From the top of the falls, follow the Weld River upstream through tall mixed-eucalypt forest to camp on the bank of the river about one and a half kilometres from the Weldborough Pub. (Camping is available at the pub for those who would like a hot meal, a shower and a few beers.)

## Day five

### Weld River to Poimena: 13 kilometres (five-six hours); easy

From the campsite, turn north on to Emu Flat Road (disused) and continue for five kilometres, before turning right at a T-junction and gradually ascending the Blue Tier on a well-marked track. About halfway up, where the old road becomes a track, there is a side trip to the Wyniford Weir. This makes a great lunch spot,

with the freshwater crayfish *Astacopsis franklinii* providing the lunchtime entertainment. Return to the main track and continue east, gradually climbing up through a range of forest types to the subalpine plateau of the Blue Tier. Tonight's camp at the site of the old mining town of Poimena has a toilet, picnic table and plenty of water.



## History

In 1996, the State and Federal governments initiated the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process. Community members were invited to nominate areas worthy of protection, and the Northeast Highlands National Park Proposal was submitted. Part of the proposal was for a multiday walking track that would bring bushwalkers and tourists to the area, offset any job losses and promote an exciting future for the north-east, with potential benefits for the entire region. (The proposal can be viewed at [www.bluetier.org](http://www.bluetier.org))

The RFA was signed by the State and Federal Governments in 1997, with the Final Recommendations Report stating: 'a single reserve is the best outcome for Mount Victoria and the Blue Tier, and that in the longer term, a National Park classification is a more appropriate tenure.' This has not happened and, in an effort to highlight the magnificence of the area and the fragmentation and destruction of these important forests, the Northeast Highlands Track was born.

After countless hours of poring over maps and plotting potential routes, I walked the 'track' for the first time in early 2001. It was a huge success, and I have since become obsessed with the track. Later that year I walked it again, this time leading a group of Queenslanders who had come to Tassie to walk in remote areas not promoted by tourism.

In 2003, Forestry Tasmania announced plans to investigate the feasibility of the walk. Bass District Forestry Manager Steve Mansson claimed in the Examiner: 'we're trying to fit the walking track into existing reserves as well as con-

sidering our harvesting plans for the rest of the State Forest.' What that actually meant was that Forestry Tasmania doesn't have any intention of protecting these forests.

Forestry Tasmania employed a consultant to walk sections of the track, using track notes I had prepared, resulting in the Northeast Walking Trail Field Survey. In October 2003 the report and feasibility study were released. While the independent track consultant employed by Forestry Tasmania found that 'a very real potential exists for a track from Mt Victoria to the Blue Tier', Forestry Tasmania's Community Liaison Officer prepared a Report on the Trail Feasibility Survey and found that the walk was 'unviable'.

In summary, the report states: 'The consultant's GPS and flagged routes do not hold enough scenic values and interest to sustain a multiday walk.' This despite the fact that the track offers walkers a fantastic array of forest types, visits stunning waterfalls, crosses pristine streams, contains interesting relics from the mining era, has sensational views, unusual rock formations and petroglyphs, towering tree ferns, Gondwanan forests, glacial refugia and native flora, and is the habitat for a great many species of native wildlife.

With so short walks, the north-east is unique in that it offers something for everyone. The walks range from a 15-minute disabled-access forest walk to half-day trips and the entire 80 kilometre Northeast Highlands Track.

For more information, contact Lesley Nicklason: [lesley.nicklason@bigpond.com](mailto:lesley.nicklason@bigpond.com)

## Day six

### Poimena to Groom River Valley: 11 kilometres (six-seven hours); moderate-hard

Take the well-marked Australia Hill Track from camp to the summit of Australia Hill before descending, steeply at first. This route follows the path of an old aerial haulage way from the tin-mining era, 1880–1940, passing some fascinating relics, before veering west to cross Crystal Creek. The track then meets Lottah Road at the Duko Adit (an old tunnel complete with glow-worms!). From Crystal Hill descend on the taped walking track into the Groom River Valley, a treasure-trove of natural features: the Cradle Tree, Blue Tier Giant (both unique and awe-inspiring Eucalyptus regnans) and the beautiful Groom River. You will need to carry water from here to the campsite near Lehnars Ridge Road.

## Day seven

### Lehnars Ridge to Halls Falls: 10 kilometres (four-five hours); easy-moderate

Follow Lehnars Ridge Road in an easterly direction for five kilometres, then turn right on to Anchor Road. After 800 metres, turn left on to an old road and continue to the Groom River—a great lunch spot. Traverse a small forested hill before following the river to the old weir and Halls Falls, a ten-minute walk from the car park at the track's end.

Lesley Nicklason has many strings to her bow: mother, nurse, community worker, professional walking guide, and much more. She has been involved with Friends of the Blue Tier for more than 15 years.



# EXPLORE NEW HEIGHTS

Cradle Mountain - Overland Track, Tasmania  
Photo by Peter Greg



Top maps



Compass page

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# Burnt offerings

## Marchantia and fire moss

**WHEN IS A FLOWER NOT A FLOWER? THE ANSWER** is in this photo. The flower-like structures belong to the liverwort *Marchantia foliacea*, which appears in the first few months after a fire in the more moist parts of Australia. This native species has a huge range, extending from southwest Western Australia through South Australia and all the eastern states, also growing in New Zealand, other western Pacific islands, and the subantarctic Macquarie Island.

The thick, fleshy, dark-green part of the plant (the thallus) has a waxy, waterproof surface and is attached tightly to the soil by fine hairs called rhizoids. The flower-like structures shown are archegoniophores, the plant's female reproductive organs, where spores are produced in downward-pointing capsules. (The male reproductive organs are also umbrella-shaped and are called antheridiophores.) These unusual organs are also produced by other *Marchantia* species, as well as species in other genera. If the thallus is turned over, two rows of crimson or purple scales can be seen along its midline. Using a hand lens, polygonal areas of cells can be seen on the upper surface, each with a pore in the centre that leads into an internal air chamber where the plant exchanges gases with the atmosphere.

The orange plant in the photo is *Funaria hygrometrica*, also called fire moss. It is the most common moss in the world and can be found on every continent, including Antarctica. Like *Marchantia foliacea*, it appears a few months after a fire. It is a vivid bright green at first, with only tiny leaves, but it quickly produces a swollen, spore-filled capsule on a long stalk, after which the plant changes to the orange-brown colour shown in the photo and the capsule dries out and becomes wrinkled.

After fire, both of these plants can carpet large areas of soil, reducing erosion and stabilising the soil for the seeds of vascular plants. After a few years they die out, but the millions of spores they produce remain in the soil, ready for the next blaze. *Marchantia* can also be found in long-unburnt habitats such as old-growth forests, where it is probably a recoloniser of naturally disturbed soil, particularly on freshly scoured stream banks. *Funaria* is sometimes found on roadsides and other dry, disturbed areas, and in greenhouses where nutrients are used to encourage plant growth.

A very similar species to *Marchantia foliacea* is *Marchantia berteroana*, with very pale scales covering most of the thallus's underside. A species introduced from Europe, *Marchantia polymorpha*, has a dark stripe down the centre of the thallus's upper surface. All three species (and *Funaria*) can be greenhouse weeds, but *Marchantia polymorpha* is especially prevalent due to its preference for permanently moist soil. Nursery-grown plants for use in revegetation projects should always be checked for introduced mosses and liverworts before they are



Photographer Travis Easton writes: 'I came across this fascinating specimen just past Little Waterloo Bay on day three of a big eight-day circumnavigation I did of Wilsons Promontory back in January 2005 (see Wild 104). Arising before dawn in the hope of a memorable sunrise, the overcast conditions didn't deliver, but the explosion of life amongst the blackened trees from the previous April's bushfire enthralled me in a more subtle way. Soon after donning my pack I found this unusual plant which was quite unlike any I had seen before.' Travis Easton

planted, as they can be a major vector for the spread of weed species.

The genus *Marchantia* (pronounced mar-kant-ee-a) honours French botanist Nicolas Marchant (died 1678), director of horticulture at the Jardin du Roi and a favourite of Jean Baptiste Gaston, Duc d'Orléans. The genus was originally named by his son Jean Marchant (1650–1738), who also became director of horticulture at the

same garden. The genus *Funaria* (pronounced fun-ee-ree-uh) takes its name from the Latin *funis* (a cord) and *aris* (resembling), referring to the twisted, cord-like stalk supporting the capsule. 

David Meagher

To submit a photo for All Things Great and Small contact [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au). We will accept photos of plants or animals. Published photos will be accompanied by some history which we will source.



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# D-day for a global climate agreement

The Wilderness Society's (TWS) Gavan McFadzean reports on the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poland

With the Kyoto climate treaty soon to expire, world leaders have given themselves two years to strike a new global agreement to tackle climate change. The consensus amongst the scientific community is that countries must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 25–40 per cent if the planet is to avoid the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

The negotiations commenced in December 2007 in Bali, where the newly elected Rudd Government announced it would sign the Kyoto Agreement and participate in negotiating the new treaty. The halfway point in the climate talks, the December 2008 meeting in Poznan, should have been where countries signalled their emissions targets for a new climate deal to be signed at Copenhagen in December 2009.

But Poznan was more like groundhog day, with countries keeping their emission reduction targets and other measures under wraps. Upon arrival, the expectations that TWS and other organisations held for this conference were hosed down. The main excuses for inaction? The fact that US President elect Barack Obama was not taking the helm until January, and the global economic crisis.

The European Union, traditional leaders in these negotiations, did not have a clear position, while Canada, Japan and Russia had the worst form, helping Australia oppose the setting of tough emissions targets, while also justifying their own poor records and alarming increases in emissions. After setting high expectations by signing Kyoto, Australia has so far announced a pathetic target of a five per cent reduction in emissions, receiving national and international condemnation.

In the end, it was the developing countries, China and the small island nations—the countries that will be most affected but are the least responsible for the problem—who put up the most constructive proposals for tackling climate change.

## Climate change and the future of the world's forests

When the Bali talks commenced a year ago, the role of the world's forests in reducing climate change was not a talking point. However, it is now a key issue in negotiating a new treaty as more governments become aware that we don't have a chance of keeping the global temperature increase below two degrees unless we significantly increase worldwide forest protection.

The Stern Review highlighted the fact that deforestation accounts for 18 per cent of global

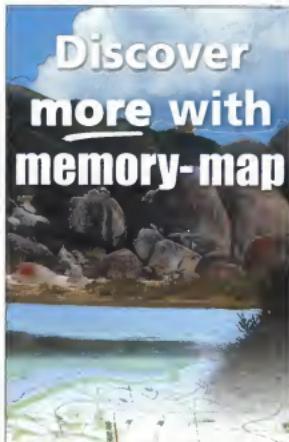


greenhouse-gas emissions, with new data suggesting that logging emissions are at least that high. If logging and tree clearing make up one-third of the global emissions problem, halting this needs to be one-third of the solution. However, getting firm commitments on increasing forest protection, reducing logging and ending the conversion of forests to plantations was tough going in Poznan.

The task before the next conference in Copenhagen is to close serious loopholes left over from the Kyoto agreement—loopholes that encourage the conversion of old-growth forests to regrowth forests and plantations, and do not require developed countries such as Australia to account for their considerable logging emissions. These loopholes now threaten to be adopted in the new treaty. Developing countries with huge

forest areas like Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and the Congo are asking: 'If Australia can ignore the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from logging old growth and converting their forests into plantations, why can't we?' The acceptance of the loopholes would lead to an alarming increase in logging around the world and undermine efforts to achieve fast, deep cuts in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

There is a long way to go to make sure that the protection of the world's forests is a key pillar of the Copenhagen agreement, but our efforts in Poznan have given us a real chance of success in 2009. There has been a lot of talk about the need for global leadership on climate change. But this must be the year when talk becomes action, a process that begins at home with the Rudd Government seriously needing to improve its commitment to change.



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## Red gums: A WIN FOR VICTORIA



Volunteer campaigners raft up on the Murray River near Echuca to show support for the new red gum national parks. Emma Capp

### The Wilderness Society's Jess Abrahams reports

On 30 December Victorian Premier John Brumby announced that large areas of Victorian red gum forest and wetland along the Murray, Ovens and Goulburn rivers would be protected in 95 000 hectares of new and expanded national parks. The decision follows a three-year investigation by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC), which recommended that the government take urgent action after studies revealed that 75 per cent of river red gums in some areas were stressed, dead or dying.

Four new red gum national parks (Barmah, Gunbower, Lower Goulburn and Warby-Ovens) will be created, and Murray Sunset and Terrick Terrick National Parks significantly expanded. A number of new regional parks will also be established. Two of the new parks will be co-managed by traditional owners—a first in Victoria. The decision opens the way for traditional owners to seek joint management for other parks—a significant win for Indigenous rights in Victoria.

Hunting of feral animal species by licensed recreational shooters will be permitted in the new national parks, which will also cater for recreational users in other ways: campfires and associated firewood collection will be allowed year-round, as will camping with horses. The regional parks will also allow walking and camping with dogs. Unfortunately, parts of Gunbower, Benwell and Guttram State Forests will remain available for logging, and the proposed Leighur-Koorangie National Park did not eventuate—the area will remain open for duck hunting instead.

However, the news is overwhelmingly good: with an end to cattle grazing and red gum

logging reduced by more than 70 per cent, the major threats to these forests are significantly curtailed. When the various state and federal water-reform initiatives are realised and the resulting environmental flows finally released, these forests and wetlands should recover and develop resilience in the face of climate change. The announcement is one of the most significant conservation outcomes in Victoria's history and follows years of hard work from the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth and the Victorian National Parks Association.

Premier Brumby deserves a big thank you for this courageous decision (see box below), as do all the volunteers, campaigners and supporters who have helped to make these new parks a reality. We look forward to seeing them enshrined in legislation before the end of 2009, and will continue to work to ensure the release of essential environmental water flows.

While the forests in Victoria have been given the protection they deserve, New South Wales Premier Nathan Rees continues to allow river red gums to be logged for low-value products such as fence posts, railway sleepers and firewood. The NSW Government should follow Victoria's lead and reduce the pressure on the already stressed ecosystem by protecting their extensive red gum forests.

### Act now

Send a message of thanks to Premier Brumby by visiting [www.wilderness.org.au/redgum](http://www.wilderness.org.au/redgum). At the same time, you can send a message to NSW Premier Nathan Rees asking that he follow Victoria's lead.

# Brown Mountain



Beautiful old growth forest near Mt Brown in East Gippsland. *Judith Deland*

## Jill Redwood on the imminent destruction of some of East Gippsland's most important old growth forests

East Gippsland's forests are now under greater threat than at any time in recent memory. Relative to the area of forest, the rate of logging in this corner of Australia has been as relentless as that in the Amazon, and it continues today in the small surviving stands of ancient forest.

One of these areas is Brown Mountain. The forests that grow here were identified as having such high natural values that the Australian Heritage Commission designated them as National Estate in the 1980s. Unfortunately, the title came without legal protection, and the responsibility to care for those values was handed to the Victorian Government. Following the tradition of the last few decades of state governments, in 1989 Labor chose to clear-fell Brown Mountain's rich old growth forests. This decision caused massive fallout, with 300 people arrested in the following six weeks. Some of the forest was converted to commercial tree crops but other areas remained untouched.

Seventeen years later, in 2006, the State Government promised to protect the last significant stands of old growth forest in East Gippsland and establish a tourist walk through these giant trees, something which the local community had been doing informally for more than ten years. But what happened after this was a cold, calculated move by VicForests, the logging arm of the government. Knowing these immense trees would soon be protected, they quickly mapped the forest for logging. Ignoring public objections, they clear-felled the first coupe—calling it 'The Walk'—in November and December 2008. Despite a huge public outcry and protest action, Premier Brumby has bowed to logging interests

and is going along with plans to destroy the forests his government promised to protect two and a half years ago.

East Gippsland is the last bastion for the state's ancient forests and the rare wildlife that rely on large, hollow-bearing trees. Yet not a single old-growth walk has been created for those wanting to experience their grandeur and rich diversity.

Strangely, the promise to 'protect all significant stands of old growth currently available for logging' overlooked these National-Estate-listed old growth forests, yet put a moratorium on 'old growth' that includes burnt regrowth and cow paddocks. Conservation groups have been demanding that the mapped areas be revised to honour the promise for the past two years, during which time we have seen more of the remaining forest crashing to the ground.

The government has delayed the promise for so long that it seems deliberate. After all, the longer they stall, the more they can log and the less valuable forest there is to preserve; the logging industry stays off their backs and they get the opportunity to announce the whole farce again at the next election. The logging of the most significant stand of old growth on Brown Mountain is the ultimate show of contempt for the public's deep concern and respect for our ancient native forests.

## Act now

Write to Premier John Brumby or Minister for the Environment Gavin Jennings to express your disgust at the continued destruction of East Gippsland's old growth forests: [john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au) or [Gavin.Jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:Gavin.Jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au)

# Australian Alps national heritage listing

**Geoff Mosley reports**

The November 2008 inclusion of 11 Australian Alps national parks, nature reserves and a wilderness area on the National Heritage List should be enthusiastically welcomed. The outstanding natural and cultural heritage values of the Alps—including significant geological and botanical features, several fine wilderness areas and important connections for the traditional owners—are widely known and cherished. Listing will bring future proposals under the scrutiny of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and should pave the way for the long overdue processing of the World Heritage nomination promised for the area by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in his 1989 Statement on the Environment, *Our Country Our Future*.

Unfortunately, restricting the listing to the Alps shows a serious lack of vision on the part of the Federal Government. The six official reports which followed Hawke's statement all found that the feature of greatest international significance in the region is the sequence of sclerophyll vegetation extending from the coastal heaths through the forests to the summits, and from there down the slopes to the woodlands of the inland plains. Yet these areas have not even been assessed for National Heritage listing—the resulting listed areas are, in effect, legless.

Because of the history of past nominations, the alpine resorts, historic and scenic reserves of Victoria have missed out while the resorts in NSW are covered by the listing. Wilderness has also been given a raw deal: if you check the official listed 'values' in the gazette notice, you won't find reference to wilderness. (An earlier nomination mentioning wilderness values was rejected.)

Environment Minister Peter Garrett has declared his support for the principle of protected area contiguity, but there aren't any signs of this being applied in Victoria. Mt Buffalo and Baw Baw National Parks are isolated from the rest of the listed area, with a nomination extending the Alpine National Park to Mt Baw Baw National Park (see *Wild* no 107) ignored.

The following areas have been listed: the Australian Capital Territory's Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve; Kosciuszko and Brindabella national parks, Scabby Range and Bimberi nature reserves in NSW; and Victoria's Alpine, Snowy River, Baw Baw and Mt Buffalo national parks, and Avon Wilderness.

# Mining the Wenlock? What a croc!

Glenn Walker reports on plans to mine aluminium near the Wenlock River

The Wenlock River on Cape York Peninsula is one of our last great wild rivers. With Australia's greatest diversity of freshwater fish, the river has some of the country's best crocodile habitat, is an important oasis for native wildlife during the dry season and is also of immense cultural value. TWS has long advocated the protection of the Wenlock under Queensland's Wild Rivers Act laws.

So spectacular and brimming with crocs is the Wenlock that when Steve Irwin died the Federal Government and Australia Zoo opted to purchase a huge cattle property encompassing the river to convert into the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. But the Irwin family soon found themselves locked into a high-profile battle with fledgling mining company Cape Alumina, who are seeking to develop a strip-mining operation for bauxite (aluminium) over the reserve and close to the Wenlock. This will destroy tall eucalyptus forests and seriously threaten rainforest springs. The company also wants to extract millions of litres of water from the river, reducing water flows in dry times to potentially critical levels.

On top of this, under archaic laws from the 1950s and 1960s multinational mining company Rio Tinto has the right to take up to 80 per cent of the water from the river and build dams without environmental approval. Rio is currently strip mining further south, near Weipa, but its min-



An aerial view of the threatened Wenlock River in far north Queensland. Glenn Walker

ing lease covers the Wenlock region and it will soon move north.

In a major breakthrough in the campaign to save the river, in December 2008 the Queensland Government finally released a draft of the wild river protection plan for the Wenlock system. The plan (which has a six-month consultation period) provides robust exclusion zones for mining around important watercourses and wetlands, removing 15–20 per cent of Cape Alumina's proposed production area and creating serious doubts about the viability of the mine.

The question of water allocations remains largely unanswered. For the future health of the Wenlock, it is critical that the final plan prohibits mining companies from building dams and extracting large amounts of water, particularly during the dry months of the year.

## Act now

You can help us save the Wenlock from mining proposals by taking part in our latest cyber-action. Please visit [www.wilderness.org.au/wenlock](http://www.wilderness.org.au/wenlock)—every voice counts.

## Our tallest tree

### Brian Walters on tall timber

In Tasmania's southern forests, Forestry Tasmania staff have just found the tallest tree known in Australia. Standing at 101 metres, it is a magnificent find, higher than any tree discovered for decades. Contrary to some reports, it is not the second tallest tree in the world—there are 16 trees in the USA alone that are more than no metres high. But Australia once had much taller trees.

The Ferguson Tree near Healesville, Victoria, was measured by Victorian government surveyor and Inspector of State Forests William Ferguson with a tape measure on 21 February 1872. From its base to the point where it had broken in its fall, it was 435 feet (133 metres). It was three feet in diameter where it had broken and Ferguson did not measure the crown, but wrote: 'I fully believe that before it fell it must have been more than 500 feet high. As it now lies it forms a complete bridge across a narrow ravine.'

The tallest standing Californian redwood is the newly-discovered 'Hyperion' of the Redwood State Park, standing 115.55 metres tall.

The tallest North American tree ever known was a Douglas fir measured at 122 metres. Unlike Australia's Ferguson Tree, the giant Douglas fir was not professionally measured, so must remain a tantalising anecdote.

Other trees of which we have reliable records from Victoria in the 19th century are:

- A tree at Mt Baw Baw measured at 470 feet (143 metres) by surveyor G W Robinson before 1889.
- The Centennial Exhibition Tree from the Menzies Creek area, measured at 400 feet (122 metres) after felling. This tree was felled so that its spectacular trunk could be dismantled and then reassembled to form a display in the 1888 Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne. There are good photographs in the State Library of Victoria.
- A fallen tree in the Dandenong ranges measured by surveyor David Boyle in 1862 at 392 feet (119 metres). Again, the tree had broken in its fall, and Boyle estimated that the top would be another 30 feet, giving a total height of about 420 feet (128 metres).
- Victorian trees which were huge but which would not top the tallest remaining trees in North America are:
  - Thorpdale tree in South Gippsland, felled in 1880 and then accurately measured by surveyor G Corinthaite to be 375 feet high (114 metres).
  - Olongolah tree near Beech Forest in the Otways, measured by an unnamed Colac Shire Engineer on a date prior to 1900 at 347 feet (106 metres).
  - The Neerim Giant was measured by a government surveyor to be 325 feet (99 metres). It had a broken top, however, and must once have been considerably taller. It was destroyed by fire early in the 20th century.
  - In 1939 in Toorongo Forest, Noojee, another fallen tree was measured by Inspector of Forests, F G Gerraty, to be 348 feet (106 metres). The newly found Tasmanian tree has been named 'Centurion'. Although the tree (and another 86 metre giant next to it) will be protected, the forest in which they stand is not classed as 'old growth' and is not protected.

# Chain of Bays park extension

David Kirner reports on positive developments in South Australia

According to State Minister for the Environment Jay Weatherill, the west coast of SA will have three enlarged conservation parks at Venus Bay, Baird Bay and Searcy Bay. Seven hundred kilometres from Adelaide and 150 kilometres from the Great Australian Bight National Park, the 'Chain of Bays' area has seven interconnected bays: Venus, Anxious, Baird, Searcy, Sceale, Corvisart and Streaky. Conservationists have campaigned for the whole area to be preserved to ensure the survival of indigenous flora and fauna. The park extension will expand the Venus Bay Conservation Park, the Baird Bay Islands Conservation Park and the Point Labatt Conservation Park and Aquatic Reserve. Private land has also been purchased at Searcy Bay adjacent to a breeding site for a rare southern subspecies of ospreys. More private land is earmarked for purchase at other significant sites at Cape Blanche, which borders Sceale and Searcy bays.

The decision to make three park extensions has come on the back of intensive lobbying from the Friends of Sceale Bay, leading to a government report called Coastlinks: Report on Opportunities to Protect Land from Venus Bay to Streaky Bay. Released in November 2008, the report embraces the concept of expanding conservation parks to protect endangered species, including the Australian sea lion, the white-bellied sea eagle and the osprey. Many of the themes of the report embrace the 'conservation corridor' principles of the 'East Meets West Nature Links' plan linking Western Australia to SA.

Recent events in the area such as tow surfing around osprey breeding sites, bulldozing of native vegetation without permits, clifftop housing proposals and shooting of endangered wildlife have caused concern amongst conservationists and politicians alike, resulting in a protection plan encompassing a large area of land. Four new Coastcare grants for the area announced in December 2008 will include a full marine-life survey, a community guide to caring for the area, a bird survey and replanting of indigenous species near the coast.

The Friends of Sceale have been successful in having Australian sea lions protected in Sceale Bay following the declaration of the Nicholas Baudin Island Conservation Park and Aquatic Reserve in 2004. In 2006 they had the Sceale Bay Conservation Reserve upgraded to Conservation Park and had some small coastal islands in Baird Bay added to the Baird Bay Island Conservation Park.



Australian sea lions basking in the sun on Nicholas Baudin Island, off Cape Blanche in South Australia.  
Grant Hobson

## Woodchips

### The other Mt Etna

Stephen Bunton reports that Australia's longest-running conservation battle is over. Mt Etna (see *Wild* no 76), a small conical limestone hill near Rockhampton, Queensland, has been threatened by quarrying for more than 40 years. The action of cavers throughout Australia, and numerous legal battles, has finally resulted in this dispute being resolved favourably. Since quarrying began, a large proportion of the hill has been removed, destroying a number of caves. Most significant of these was the deliberate destruction of Crystal Palace Cave and penetration into Bat Cleft. Populations of four bat species were threatened including the extremely rare ghost bat (*Macrotis gigas*). The Central Queensland Speleological Society, the University of Queensland Speleological Society and the umbrella organisation Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) were heavily committed to the cause, which went to the High Court. The High Court case established the standing of environmental and community groups to be heard. The case to determine whether quarrying should be stopped was never tested be-

cause ASF and its supporters could not risk any possible liabilities. The ASF established an Environmental Gift Fund, partly as a result of the Mt Etna campaign, to ensure it could continue to be at the forefront in protecting caves and karst. Once mining concluded at Mt Etna, Cement Australia started rehabilitating the quarry sites. Since the rehabilitation was not complete the ASF agreed for the Fund to receive and manage the Eastern Quarry with several caves in return for continuing the rehabilitation. This was meant to be an interim measure to enable rehabilitation before the titles were handed to Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS). The battle ended when Cement Australia handed the titles directly to QPWS in a ceremony at Camoo in September 2008. As a result of the tax-deductible donations it received, the ASF now has a fund available for cave and karst conservation works.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

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MOUNTAIN SAFETY RESEARCH

# Playing with fire

Michael Hampton surveys lightweight camping stoves

## Wild Gear Surveys: what they are and what they're not

The purpose of Wild Gear Surveys is to assist readers in purchasing specialist outdoors equipment of the quality and with the features most appropriate for their needs; and to save them time and money in the process.

The cost of 'objective' and meaningful testing is beyond the means not only of *Wild*, but of the Australian outdoors industry in general and we are not aware of such testing being regularly carried out by an outdoors magazine anywhere in the world. Similarly, given the number of products involved, field testing is beyond the means of Australia's outdoors industry. Wild Gear Surveys summarise information, collate and present it in a convenient and readily comparable form, with guidelines and advice to assist in the process of wise equipment selection.

Surveyors are selected for their knowledge of the subject and their impartiality. Surveys are checked and verified by an independent referee, and reviewed by *Wild*'s editorial staff. Surveys are based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of the relevant issue's production; ranges and specifications may change later. Before publication each manufacturer/distributor is sent a summary of the surveyor's findings regarding the specifications of their products for verification.

Some aspects of surveys, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgement on the part of the surveyor, the referee and *Wild*, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily upon price relative to features and quality. A product with more elaborate or specialised features may be rated more highly by someone whose main concern is not price.

An important criterion for inclusion is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of the major Australian cities. With the recent proliferation of brands and models, and the constant ebb and flow of their availability, 'wide availability' is becoming an increasingly difficult concept to pin down.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and for the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.



Cooking with gas: Gemma Woldendorp organising dinner during an expedition to the Miyar Valley in the Indian Himalaya, India. Natasha Sebire

**YOU COULD CALL MY LIFESTYLE SIMPLISTIC—** 75 per cent of my cooking, both in and out of the bush, is done on a single-burner stove. The basic lightweight stove for bushwalking hasn't changed that much since I started cooking outdoors almost 30 years ago. As then, today's stoves are primarily fuelled by alcohol, petrol/kerosene or gas. I tried all three fuel types and various cooking systems before opting for the system I've now been using for more than 20 years.

This survey contains a selection of the latest stoves, with the main refinements being in cooking systems, materials, superior fuels and all-round efficiency. These units can be expensive—they always were—but if you buy right and look after your equipment, they will serve you well for many years. Please note that

some stoves in the survey are integrated, including windshields, pots and pans, in a Cooking System. As noted in Tips for Use, a cooking system can be assembled to suit any stove. With intelligent use, this can have a greater bearing on a stove's overall efficiency (including fuel use) and therefore its weight than the type of stove.

### Fuel type

The most significant variable in stoves is fuel, and there are three basic varieties. Keen outdoors enthusiasts and professional guides will generally use pressurised petroleum stoves. These fuels (Shellite, kerosene, unleaded petrol) are widely available and very efficient, with the fuel contained in an integrated tank or dedicated bottle which can be refilled as necessary.

There aren't any disposable cartridges to deal with, but extra fuel bottles must be carried on longer trips. Most pressurised stoves are quite noisy, and some simmer poorly. Working with a tool that relies on squirting pressurised petrol is potentially dangerous—daunting for some users. I recently witnessed an incident where a new owner hadn't correctly connected the burner to the bottle. Leaking fuel ignited and the stove became a potential petrol bomb. Fortunately, experienced heads were present to deal with the situation. Needless to say, petroleum stoves must be operated with care.

## Tips for use

- Familiarise yourself with your stove, and always check it is in working order before a long trip. Include a repair kit and a wire pricker for cleaning jets if necessary. Lubricate washers and O-rings with silicone grease.
- Check with your retailer to see if your stove can be serviced by the manufacturer or its agent.
- Carefully work out your stove's fuel consumption so that you carry enough. Cross-country ski-tourers (or those undertaking any trip above the snowline) should remember that extra fuel will be required to melt snow if running water is unavailable.
- Each member of the party should carry a lighter and a spare. Consider some of the commercially available flints and sparkers to avoid the wet-lighter blues.
- A windshield is useful as it will speed up cooking and help to conserve fuel. Aluminium 'flashing' is ideal. It is used to stop rising damp in house walls and can be purchased from hardware shops. (Note: some gas stove manufacturers warn against using heat shields with their stoves. Read and follow the instructions carefully.)
- If you must cook inside the tent, keep the stove in the vestibule, well away from the tent walls, and ensure that there is adequate ventilation.
- If cooking on snow or sand, use some sort of insulated platform to prevent your stove from sinking and tipping its valuable contents.
- If you leave your stove out at night, cover it to prevent water getting in the jet.
- Use an appropriate fuel bottle and mark it accordingly.
- Lightweight pots with well-fitting lids are more efficient. Frying-pan lids may be handy, but are heavier.
- Built-in handles may or may not suit you. Remember that many a trip has been thwarted by forgotten pot holders.
- Pots that nest inside one another are ideal.
- On chilly mornings, keep your canister in your sleeping bag to warm the gas before use.
- Not all petroleum stoves can take a kerosene jet, so consider whether this is important to you.

Although these stoves can be run (very cheaply) on unleaded petrol, it is a dirty fuel and jets may require frequent cleaning after using it. However, if that's all there is available, it will do. Kerosene is also a dirty-burning fuel, but is often the only fuel available in Third World countries. Stoves often require the fitting of a different jet to burn kerosene, and will need to be primed (pre-heated) for the fuel to vapourise. Kerosene is also prone to leaking from even the most tightly sealed bottles—when it does, it's nasty! Shellite (also known as lighter fuel, white gas, white spirits or Coleman fuel) doesn't have the additives of engine fuels and is thus the fuel of choice.

Stoves using gas are very clean, burn quietly and are light and very simple to operate. Gas also allows good simmer control. The main drawback are the disposable fuel canisters. These are only available from specialised camping and hardware stores and once empty, they are another bulky piece of garbage to be carried and disposed of. Fuel stoves that run on both petroleum and gas are beginning to appear—highly desirable but expensive.

Gas canisters can contain propane, butane, or a mix of both (isobutane). In normal conditions, there are only marginal differences in their performance. Butane is cleaner burning and less toxic, but isn't good in cold weather. Propane or isobutane are recommended for trips above the snowline.

The availability of fuel can be different overseas, with fuels often sold under different names or sources. For example, in the USA I eventually found bulk supplies of 'metho' under the label 'denatured alcohol' in the paint section of a hardware store, while Caltex (not Shell) have the monopoly on white spirits in New Zealand.



One of the new breed of highly efficient integrated stoves, the MSR Reactor. Right, original efficient integrated stove, the Personal Cooking System from Jetboil.

Alcohol stoves are generally integrated with a windshield, pots and pans. This fuel (sold in Australia as methylated spirits) is less volatile than petrol and burns silently. If it does spill, the subsequent flame is cooler and the fuel evaporates quickly. Because of this, many educational institutions (as well as other users), prefer the relative safety, simplicity and low price of alcohol stoves. Alcohol and its fumes are also less offensive than petroleum—a small blessing if it happens to leak in your rucksack. (Note: the first brew will taste awful if the burner leaks in your pot between uses. Experienced users always burn all the fuel in the burner.) The negatives with these stoves are their efficiency and boil times: they generally use more fuel, while their heat output can be markedly affected by available shelter and ambient air temperature. If cooking or simmering for extended periods, the burner may require refilling on a regular basis: for safety, it must be completely out and cool.

Another point to consider is that post 9/11, carrying fuel bottles and stoves on aircraft has become problematic, even when they are meticulously clean. Research your airline's regulations—don't leave it until you arrive at the airport to check.

The amount of fuel needed, and thus its weight, will depend on various factors. The first of these is meal preparation prior to a trip. If your stove's main function is to boil water—for freeze-dried or rehydrated meals, the odd cup of soup and a brew—then fuel use will be minimal. Tasks such as simmering or melting snow will use more fuel. The season, weather, altitude and available shelter are all contributing factors. An experienced user of an alcohol or petroleum

**Stoves**

Stoves	Fuel type	Dimensions, millimetres	Stove weight, grams	Fuel tank weight, grams	Fuel tank type	Cooking system	Boiling time, minutes	Stability	Heat control	Quietness	Value	Comments	Apposite price, \$
<b>Jetboil USA</b> <a href="http://www.jetboil.com">www.jetboil.com</a>													
Personal Cooking System (PCS)	G	104 x 180	425	194	S	N	Integrated	2 for 500 mL	●	●●●	●●●	●●	One litre pot supplied is suitable for boiling water; pot is insulated and can be handled without pot grippers; integrated heat exchanger and piezo ignition
Group Cooking System (GCS)	G	175 x 110	540	360	S	N	Integrated	4	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	1.5 litre pot supplied is suitable for frying; pot is insulated and can be handled without pot grippers; integrated heat exchanger and piezo ignition
<b>Kovea Korea</b> <a href="http://www.kovea.com">www.kovea.com</a>													
Supalite Titanium	G	34 x 62 x 75	60	360	S	N	Available	3	●●1/2	●●●	●●●	●●1/2	One of the lightest gas stoves on the market
Titanium	G	37 x 62 x 75	88	360	S	N	Available	3	●●1/2	●●●	●●●	●●1/2	Piezo ignition included
Booster +1	G <sub>1</sub> K <sub>2</sub> S <sub>3</sub>	80 x 75 x 70	470	360 with gas; 115 with bottle	B <sub>4</sub> Y <sub>5</sub> S <sub>6</sub>	Y	Available	3	●●●1/2	●●1/2	●●	●●1/2	Multifuel stove; stove weight includes pump; bottle weight doesn't include fuel
<b>MSR USA</b> <a href="http://www.msrs.com">www.msrs.com</a>													
Pocket Rocket	G	100 x 50 x 50	85	230	S	N	Available	3.5	●	●●1/2	●●●	●●1/2	Will nest in MSR Titan kettle kit (available separately)
Simmerlite	S	100 x 150 x 90	240	180	B	Y	Available	3.75	●●●1/2	●●1/2	●●●	●●●	One of several similar petroleum models in MSR family; built-in jet cleaner; windshield supplied
Reactor	G	160 x 135	595	230	S	N	Integrated	3	●●	●●●	●●1/2	●●	Comes with 1.7 litre pot with collapsible handle and see-through lid; integrated heat exchanger
<b>Optimus Sweden</b> <a href="http://www.optimus.se">www.optimus.se</a>													
Crux Lite	G	84 x 57 x 31	70	360	S	N	BYO	3	●●●	●●●1/2	●●●	●●●	Less compact than the Crux but lighter
Crux	G	84 x 57 x 31	85	360	S	N	BYO	3	●●●	●●●1/2	●●●	●●1/2	Compact, folding burner-head packs away under gas cylinder
Nova +	G <sub>1</sub> K <sub>2</sub> S <sub>3</sub>	125 x 86 x 67	425	360	B <sub>4</sub> Y <sub>5</sub> S <sub>6</sub>	Y	BYO	3.5	●●●1/2	●●●	●●●	●●●	Novel flame control by twisting fuel hose near bottle; built-in jet cleaner
<b>Snowpeak Japan</b> <a href="http://www.snowpeak.com">www.snowpeak.com</a>													
Lite Mix	G	88 x 95 x 95	60	230	S	N	Available	2.5	●	●●●	●●●	●●●	One of the lightest gas stoves on the market
Gigastove Titanium	G	103 x 63 x 63	75	230	S	N	Available	3	●	●●●	●●●	●●1/2	Also available in a less expensive, heavier, stainless steel version
<b>Tatona Vietnam</b> <a href="http://www.tatona.com">www.tatona.com</a>													
Multi Set	A	215 x 105	1140	na	na	N	Integrated	9	●●●●	●	●●●●	●●●●	Stainless steel set includes two pots, one lid/pan and pot grippers
<b>Trangia Sweden</b> <a href="http://www.trangia.se">www.trangia.se</a>													
xc-1 straight	A	204 x 149	305	na	na	N	Integrated	9	●●●●	●	●●●●	●●●●	Non-adjustable stainless steel straight legs; gas burner/stainless steel available; most variations between models are for the size and finish of the pots
Aluminium	A	204 x 149	305	na	na	N	Integrated	9	●●●●	●	●●●●	●●●●	Non-adjustable stainless steel straight legs; gas burner/stainless steel available; most variations between models are for the size and finish of the pots

stove will have greater control over the precise amount of fuel needed, and can get it down to the last drop. In contrast, when working out the number of gas cylinders to take, you are faced with decisions such as: 'Can I get away with a partially empty can, or should I chuck in a full one?' Some people carry an additional small canister as backup. Fuel bottles and gas canisters are available in different sizes. Obviously, the longer the trip, the more fuel bottles or canisters will be needed. Keeping all this in mind, I've steered away from providing a formula for estimating the total weight of cooking system and fuel over x amount of days.

## Dimensions

The size of the stove (folded up if appropriate) as given by the manufacturer. In some cases (most notably alcohol stoves, Jetboil and the MSR Reactor) the dimensions include cooking pot(s).

**Stove weight (excluding fuel bottle/canister)**

These were provided by the manufacturer and, unless otherwise stated, relate to the burner

component and pump only. Some stoves include the weight of billets, wind-shield and pot holders, while the Jetboil and MSR Reactor also includes the pot that comes with the burner (see Cooking System). As such, stove weight comparisons are really only useful when comparing very similar stoves. Most stoves include a case or carry bag, the weight of which is not included.

### **Fuel tank weight**

Most stoves have a separate fuel canister/bottle. Gas stoves can generally use various canisters and the brands are interchangeable and come in a range of different sizes. The fuel tank weight quoted in the table is the gross weight, not just the weight of gas. For petroleum and alcohol, the capacity of fuel bottles can vary from 300 millilitres to one litre, with the most common size being 650 millilitres. This



The Kovea Titanium stove folds down to a tiny size and is easy to use. **Left**, Kovea's Supalite Titanium folded up.



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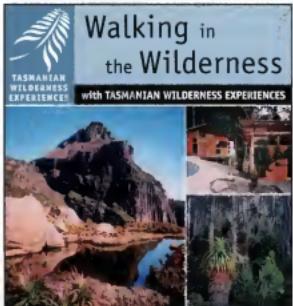


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- High Flow Rate - Pumps close to 3 litres/min, or 1 litre every 20 seconds!
- Ultralight & small - Just 221 grams and only 17.8 x 8.3 cm, perfect when space is at a premium.
- Field Maintainable - Can be cleaned repeatedly for flow recovery without tools.
- Super Convenient - Quick-Connect bottle adapter lets you filter water directly into your storage container.
- Cartridge Life: Up to 1,000 litres.



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is a convenient size for your primary fuel bottle and, unless otherwise specified, I've quoted the weight for this bottle here (excluding pump but including cap). Note that fuel bottles are usually sold separately.

### Fuel tank type

Most gas canisters are resealable, and can be screwed on/off the stove. Bottle tanks consist of an external bottle connected to the stove via a hose or pipe that is clipped into place when assembling the stove. Note that alcohol stoves don't include a fuel tank, with the average burner holding about 100 millilitres.

## Buy right

- Try out as many stoves as you can before buying. Friends, club members and even some shops will have demonstration models.
- Think about your primary activities, their duration and usual location. For casual or short-term use in Australia and New Zealand, consider alcohol or gas stoves. For longer-term use in more extreme conditions, particularly in developing countries, opt for a petroleum stove.

### Cooking system

As mentioned, some stoves include windshields, pots and pans: these are referred to as integrated. Some manufacturers sell excellent pots, pans and other accessories separately to complement their stoves (shown as 'available' in table). Anyone can assemble a practical cooking system consisting of windshield, pots, pot grippers etc, and you can mix and match with other brands (see Tips for Use): in the table BYO (build your own) refers to this. Jetboil and the MSR Reactor occupy a new category of gas stoves with an integrated pot, heat shield, heat exchanger and piezo ignition (Jetboil only). These enhance fuel efficiency and boil times, but only the specialised pots can be used.

### Boiling time

This figure is supplied by the manufacturer. Unless otherwise stated, this relates to the time taken to boil a litre of water at low altitude. As discussed earlier, many factors will influence this in the field. Some stoves are much less efficient at high altitude, in bad weather or with low fuel.

### Stability

For safety and convenience, your stove needs to be stable. Stoves with integrated cooking systems tend to be more stable, as do petroleum stoves with a bottle off to the side. Some gas stoves rely on the cylinder itself as a base. Clip-on stands are often available and their use is recommended.

### Heat control

The ability to control the heat output is indicated here. Gas stoves generally allow better

flame management than petroleum stoves; however, some of the latter have improved heat control. Becoming familiar with your stove's operation will improve control. For example, petroleum stoves will simmer better if you reduce the pressure in the tank.

### Quietness

Sometimes a roaring stove can be a comforting sound, while in cramped confines it can be deafening—a real conversation killer. Stoves range from dangerously quiet to what one pundit once called 'Chernobyl two', the fighter-jet roar of certain petroleum stoves.

### Value

This subjective rating was determined by the price of the stove in relation to its suitability for general bushwalking. More specialised needs (such as use at altitude and time constraints) will alter this rating.



The MSR Simmerlite is one of the lightest pressurised fuel stoves on the market.

### Comments

Other important features of the stoves.

### Price

This is a rough guide based on current retail prices. The actual price may vary from outlet to outlet.

## Other brands available

Brand	Distributor	Contact
Campingaz	Coleman Brands Pty Ltd	1800 224 350
Coleman	Coleman Brands Pty Ltd	1800 224 350
Gasmate	Sitro Group Australia	(03) 9543 9533
Kathmandu	Kathmandu	(03) 9267 9999
Primus	Primus Australia	(03) 9464 2466

Michael Hampton is an outdoors educator, writer, artist and photographer whose natural habitat is usually somewhere in the Grampians' Victoria Range, where he will often be found lurking around the base of crags.

This survey was refereed by Jim Groom.

# most rainwear promises are full of hot air...

It's true. And that's because most waterproof jackets use fabrics (including the "leading" fabric brand) that do not allow moisture vapour to pass through freely — commonly referred to as "breathing". They have a thin layer of polyurethane (PU) which blocks the path for direct venting — they simply cannot "breathe" easily. Consequently, moisture vapour condenses on the inside of the fabric and you end up wet from your own sweat...sound familiar?



While eVent® has all the waterproof performance you'd expect from a PTFE membrane, the absence of a PU coating allows uninhibited breathability — eVent® is the market leader in letting the sweat out.\*

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\* as tested by US Army soldier systems center, data available at <http://www.macpac.co.nz/files/event-fabric-comparison.pdf>



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# Going with gravity

The lazy person's filter

The Platypus Cleanstream is an innovation in **treating water** for drinking. It uses a novel gravity-fed bladder system—that's right, no pumping—so it can filter water while you wander off and do other chores. The system relies on new 'Hollow Fiber' filter technology, which can filter water

Left, enough to bring a tear to Newton's eye: the gravity fed Cleanstream. Bottom, the Bigzip II, now BPA free.



quickly without the need for great pressure. Fill the four litre 'dirty' bladder and hang it high. Several minutes later, its contents will have fed through the filter and into the 'clean' bladder, which can then be used as normal. The Cleanstream can filter four litres of water in just two and a half minutes, and removes 99.99999999999999 per cent of bacteria and protozoa. Cleaning is simple: reverse the heights of the bladders and back-flush the filter. The system weighs 360 grams and retails for \$199.

Platypus has also heard the call for products free of both BPA and awful tastes and produced its **Bigzip II bladders**. This new series feature wide-opening tops and quick-release hoses for easy top-ups and cleaning. The shut-off valve on the mouthpiece means less water is dispersed down your side—never funny, unless it happens to someone else. Available in 1.8, two and three litre bladders, at \$65, \$65 and \$69, respectively. Talk to **Spelean** on (02) 9966 9800 for further information regarding these products.

## Gunna go lightweight?

**One Planet** has released its first range of bushwalking tents under the One Planet brand and chosen to go light, creating the **Gunya 2**, which is—you guessed it—a two-person tent. The Gunya 2 weighs a paltry 1.2 kilograms (including pegs, stuff sacks and everything), and has a little porch area for boots and excess gear and a high-opening door for those whose backs don't like bending. It also comes with a free footprint, although this brings the weight up to 1.44 kilograms. One Planet has also brought out a version with a vestibule, the Gunya V2, and a one-person version, the Gunya V1. All the

is an instructional DVD in which the pack designer's husky tones explain how to fit and use the pack. The Edge comes in both 60 and 70 litre versions, with the smaller model having a smaller waist-belt, different stave shape and a narrower set of shoulder-straps, making it more suited to women and men with smaller body frames. Both sizes retail for \$379.95, with the 60 litre version weighing 2.4 kilograms and the 70 litre version 2.8 kilograms. Visit [www.mountaindesigns.com.au](http://www.mountaindesigns.com.au) for more information.

## Knick-Knacks

### Aircraft-grade eating tools

Remove all excuses from your summit push. Leave mum's heavy steel spoons at home and pack a set of Alpha Cutlery from Sea to Summit. For those who are counting, each piece weighs between 12 and 17 grams, is stamped and drilled from 7070-T6 aluminium and hard anodised

for a long life and safe use. Each implement features an integrated hex tool (ring spanner), with three, four and five millimetre tools across the knife, fork and spoon range. A set of three retails for \$19.95. Contact Sea to Summit for further information on (08) 9221 6617.



tents come with siliconised-nylon flies and DAC Featherlite poles. The Gunya 2 retails for \$569, while the V1 and V2 are \$519 and \$599, respectively. To find out more, call One Planet on (03) 9311 5244.

## Get an Edge

**Mountain Designs** has brought out a new **alpine rucksack** called the **Edge**. The Edge features their BAR (Biomechanical Advantage Rucksack) harness system, designed to transfer as much weight as possible to the old pelvic girdle while allowing air flow and freedom of movement. The pack has a number of nice touches, including removable waist pads, twin compartments and a floating Hypalon gear locator for carrying crampons, ice axes or any other gear you might want to stash on the outside of your pack. Another nice addition

## Hard-arse bumbag

The folks at Seacure have built a waterproof, shell-bumbag for playing hard. Crushing or soaking your phone, keys, wallet and glasses (or whatever vital gear you're made to carry by your next of kin) is now much less likely when you're out without a pack. Stashing your keys on top of the front passenger-side tyre is a thing of the past...RRP is \$30. Contact [sales@seacurebags.com](mailto:sales@seacurebags.com) for further information.



## Space pen

Who likes writing underwater? Well, that's probably because you've never tried it, but with the Inka Pen you will. In fact, it's 'guaranteed to func-

Clockwise from left, Mountain Designs' new pack, the Edge. One Planet's designers have been busy creating the lightweight Gunya 2. Alpha cutlery from Sea to Summit.



## Tasmania's Wild Tarkine Coast Walk

Take a path less travelled

If you're anything like us, a guided walk is only appealing if it offers something extraordinary. An experience of remoteness and seclusion, a genuine wilderness getaway and the opportunity to learn about and give something back to the world. To walk the Wild Tarkine Coast walk in Tasmania's north-west is all of this, and much more.

The Tarkine coastline has been assessed by the Australian Heritage Commission as "one of the world's great archaeological regions". Vast midden sites and significant cultural relicts reveal the extraordinary story of the area's indigenous people. Couple this history with giant sand dunes,

stunning ocean beaches and pristine waterholes and the Tarkine Coast walk is a truly memorable walking experience.

**Day 1** - Cruise by ferry down the rainforest flanked Pieman River to our remote coastal camp.  
**Day 2** - Walk to Interview River, spectacular rock formations, middens, west ocean beaches dissected by wild rivers.  
**Day 3** - Walk to the Lagoon River, huge middens, giant sand dunes, panoramic vistas.  
**Day 4** - Walk to Sandy Cape, home land of the Tarkineer people.

**Day 5** - Explore secluded beaches of Sandy Cape before 4wd pick up, return to Burnie, then Launceston.

Join us for five days of wonder along the Wild Tarkine Coast walk. Truly a path less travelled.

### Enquiries

For more detailed information call 03 6223 5320 or visit [www.tarkinetrails.com.au](http://www.tarkinetrails.com.au)



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Ski Mountaineering. Photo by Tim Bresl

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## From the Billy

### The Wilderness Chef produces a Lively Summer Salad

John Pillans delights us once again with something from his quiver of bush-ready recipes

Walking in the summer months offers the pleasant plus of swimming, but when dinner time rolls around it is often hard to find a filling alternative to the hot bushwalking staples. And while a salad may not sound particularly sensible, this is one recipe to which I keep coming back.

#### Lively Summer Salad

Feeds: three for dinner

Cooking time: ten minutes

Energy density: 11 kJ/g, 4.2 kJ/mL

#### Ingredients:

- 375 grams of fresh egg fettuccine
- 100 grams of salami
- 100 grams of feta cheese
- One punnet of cherry tomatoes
- 50 grams of oak leaf lettuce

#### Optional:

- One egg
- Half a cup of croutons

Blanch the fresh fettuccine to restore its texture and set aside in a bowl. Halve the tomatoes and slice the feta and salami into one centimetre strips or cubes, then combine with the pasta. If you are *au fait* with raw egg, crack over and stir through as a dressing. Finally, tear the lettuce into coin-sized pieces, sprinkle croutons on top and gently stir both through without coating.

This recipe involves two notable food hygiene issues. First, use a real salami (described in Australia as 'heat-treated')—this type of salami is easy to spot as it will be hanging in the open air at a delicatessen rather than stored in a fridge. On the other hand, the raw egg is unavoidably risky even if refrigerated. This can be minimised by obtaining the freshest ingredients you can and by storing them at cooler temperatures, but overall the risk is small for short exposures to elevated temperatures and I happily have this meal on the second night of hot January mountain trips.

A proven canyoning meal, this is ideal for any summer pursuit and sure to turn heads. The nutritionally balanced and salty salad will fill your party's stomachs without weighing down your bag.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section; payment is at our standard rate. Send them to the address at the end of this department.

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### Psychovertical

BY ANDY KIRKPATRICK (HUTCHINSON, 2008, \$69.95, [www.randomhouse.com.au](http://www.randomhouse.com.au))

Kirkpatrick is one of the world's boldest and most accomplished alpinists, and an entertaining lecturer and writer. Not bad for a dyslexic brought up in the decaying city of Hull during the Thatcher era. After being diagnosed with dyslexia, Kirkpatrick's only prospects seemed the dole queue or a career at a factory manufacturing cardboard boxes. Not content with either, he embraced a pair of ice axes and climbed with enough vigour to see him all-too-frequently in sickeningly frightful positions. Psychovertical is simultaneously a funny, gripping account of Kirkpatrick's life story and a tale of cutting-edge alpine and big-wall climbing. Ripping yarns that you shouldn't let your mum or non-climbing partner read.

Mathew Farrell

### Beyond Seven Years in Tibet

BY HEINRICH HARRER (LABYRINTH PRESS, 2008, \$59.95, [www.labrynthpress.com](http://www.labrynthpress.com))

This is a fascinating look at the extraordinary life of mountaineer Heinrich Harrer. Harrer shot to fame following the Brad Pitt rendition of his life in pre-Chinese Tibet in *Seven Years in Tibet*. Born in Austria and compulsively drawn to mountaineering, he was fated by the Nazis after making the first ascent of the North Face of the Eiger. Interned by the British during the Second World War, he eventually escaped to the closed kingdom of Tibet. However, those 'seven years in Tibet' don't do justice to the man's character or his lifelong fascination with the most remote corners of the world. In this semi-autobiographical account, he travels to Papua New Guinea, Alaska, Africa and returns again to Tibet, gathering incredible stories and insight into what makes us human. In his restless search for the unknown, it is easy to see the drive that stirs many of the great adventurers.

This daunting book of more than 500 pages rewards the curious with a story that exceeds

his more famous exploits. It is simply and clearly written and portrays an extraordinary life.

Garry Phillips

### Pedder

BY MAX ANGUS (LAKE PEDDER RESTORATION COMMITTEE, 2008, \$70, [www.fullersbookshop.com.au](http://www.fullersbookshop.com.au))

When the world finally overcomes its obsession with endless economic growth, high on the list of tasks will be restoring Lake Pedder, an event which will act as a clarion call for the correction of past environmental injustices. In the meantime, it is important to maintain resolve, and the work of the Lake Pedder Restoration Committee is of paramount importance in keeping the flame alive. In particular, new generations need to be reminded what Pedder was like, and what it can be again. Max Angus's story and his paintings do this in the most beautiful way possible. Give this book to a child, tell them the story of the drowning of the lake and how they can become part of its rescue.

Geoff Mosley

### Brolga Country

BY MITCH REARDON (JACANA, 2007, \$39.95, [www.allemandurwin.com](http://www.allemandurwin.com))

This is an account of the author's travels to find brolgas in their natural habitats in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Ecological information is scattered throughout, although an introduction to the species at the start would have been helpful. During his trips, Reardon met champions of the species and saw firsthand some of the many management issues the birds face, such as habitat decline, pollution and pest animals. The other animals encountered are beautifully described and photographed, as is the diversity of landscapes and habitats. A very readable book.

Michele Kohout

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